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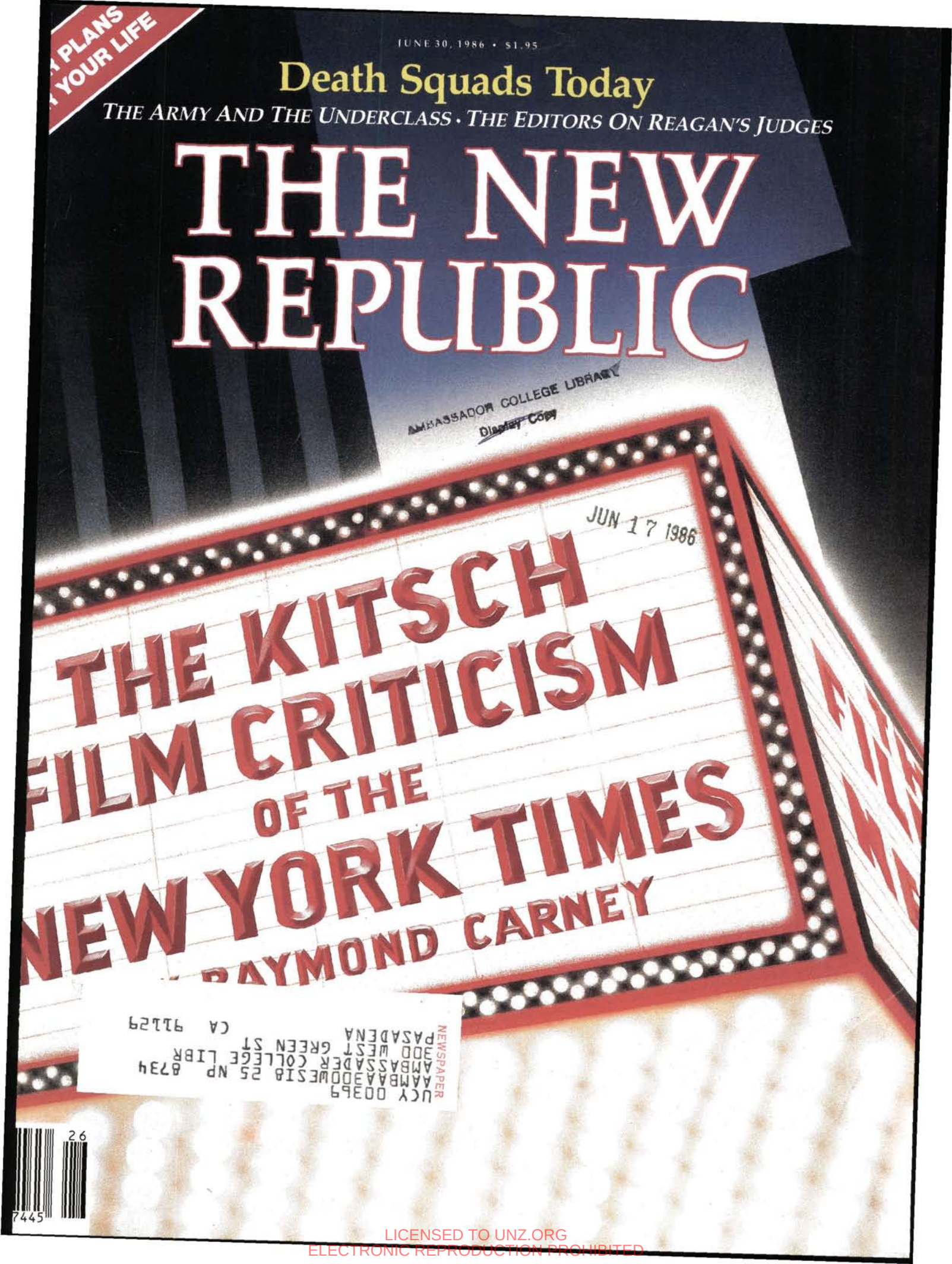

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NEWSPAPER

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CORRESPONDENCE

REVENGE OF THE ALUMNI

To the editors:

Philip Weiss's portrait of Brown ("Good Times vs. Great Books," June 9) is so absurdly slanted as to be unrecognizable to one who taught there for 17 years. But of course I only taught British history, not one of those trendy subjects like Semiotics that Weiss finds so amusing. If Weiss had looked a bit further he might have found a more realistic side to the picture. History, for example: a graduate program that is highly ranked nationally, and an undergraduate concentration ("major" to you, Mr. Weiss) that has been for years one of the two biggest as well as among the most demanding in the university, and which does in fact include the History of Science and a lot of other untrendy subjects. Yes, Brown does have its "gut" courses (what college doesn't?), its sprinkling of jocks and noisy juveniles, and an administration a bit inclined to follow the latest intellectual fads. But it also has many marvelously bright students who work as hard as their counterparts anywhere, and who flourish under a system that puts the responsibility for learning where it belongs: with the student. I am afraid that the unnamed administrator was right: quite a lot of the adverse media attention that Brown has recently received has been politically motivated.

DAVID UNDERDOWN
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

To the editors:

I have recently finished my third year at Brown and I am happy to report that I have not cheated, taken a Semiotics course, or drunk myself into submission, though I have to admit I did watch Jane Pauley when she visited.

Mr. Weiss makes much of Brown's media "obsession" or "problem." Contrary to Mr. Weiss's view, Brown became popular long before the recent media exposure. Primarily this was a result of the New Curriculum and an admissions process that admitted those self-motivated, independent students most interested in Brown and in utilizing the New Curriculum. Only over the last four or five years has one seen the intense media exposure and attention.

Somewhat related is Mr. Weiss's seeming obsession with the Semiotics Department at Brown, to which he devotes fully one-third of his commentary. It is only one of 44 departments at Brown, consists of only five faculty members, and is quite underfunded. It is hardly the vastly popular, "hot," and well-funded department Mr. Weiss implies. By concentrating so heavily on this admittedly novel, innovative, and somewhat bizarre program, Mr. Weiss comes dangerously close to stereotyping all the departments at Brown and its general academic atmosphere as abstract and media-crazed. The mixture of unique and innovative programs such as Semiotics and Egyptology with more traditional and prominent departments such as History and Engineering gives Brown its distinctive character in an educational system that is growing increasingly homogeneous and conservative.

MICHAEL FITZPATRICK, '87
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

Mr. Weiss fails to qualify his assertion that "At Brown nothing is [required]." The requirements within our major departments were pretty stiff. We were taught to read texts carefully and we were expected to discuss them clearly. Or else. I was lucky enough to major in Greek and Latin at "Good Times U." I call the Great Books to Mr. Weiss's attention. They might help him correct his tendency toward nastily self-conscious prose.

REV. JONATHAN T. GLASS, '78
Powhatan, Virginia

To the editors:

I am sure that many loyal Brown alumni will quickly rise to the defense of our alma mater. But this letter is to thank you for your scathing criticism. Perhaps my humiliation will be shared in some small measure by the administration, the faculty, and even the trustees at Brown, and overdue changes will be made. For some time I have been fearful that the immense popularity of Brown has been creating a smugness that is frightening. The "brightest and the best" are so apt to find any tradition boring. But lest your readers despair, Brown does have a remarkable past and when some of the manners of gentlemen and ladies can be restored, there will still be room for iconoclasm and sprightly intelligence and even wit.

LUCIA STEERE STICH, '33
Colorado Springs, Colorado

To the editors:

Something has gone terribly, terribly wrong at St. John's College since we left. Whatever happened to the grounds for tutor Howard Fisher's complaint that students did too much "desperate, artless boozing"? They called us "The Girls Who Lived to Dance" (Class of '79).

MARJORIE ALLISON
Denver, Colorado

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Norfolk, Virginia

MARJORIE HUTTER
Washington, D.C.

LIZ LEATHERWOOD
Fort Worth, Texas

LISA SIMEONE
Baltimore, Maryland

ON TOP OF THE GLOBE

To the editors:

Though I was flattered that P. J. Corkery borrowed from my book, *Common Ground*, in his disquisition on the *Boston Globe* ("Bloated Globe," May 26), I was dismayed to find this material mobilized for such a polemic. Certainly the *Globe* and Thomas Winship can be criticized on several counts, but I scarcely recognized the newspaper or its former editor in Mr. Corkery's malicious caricature.

J. ANTHONY LUKAS
New York, New York

To the editors:

Let's see if I have "Bloated Globe" straight. According to the bilious P. J. Corkery (who, according to the credit line, apparently couldn't hold on to jobs at the *Herald*, the *Phoenix*, or *Boston* magazine), when the Boston *Globe* wins Pulitzer Prizes for national and local reporting, or interviews a Harvard law professor about a controversial murder case (while its competition, Rupert Murdoch's *Herald*, is salivating over the victim's "final moments"), the *Globe* is just being pretentious—and has fixed the Pulitzer committee, too. But when it devotes extensive effort and space to a thoughtful study of regional rivalries, tensions, and perceptions, or eschews screeching Murdoch-style headlines, the *Globe* is being provincial.

JAMES E. BRODHEAD
Sherman Oaks, California

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

REAGAN'S PORNOGRAPHER

In the climactic scene of Sylvester Stallone's new movie, *Cobra*, set for no logical reason in an abandoned but fully operating steel mill supposedly located in northern California, the hero impales the villain on a giant hook and watches him writhe in agony as he's carried off into a flaming furnace. Then, all that remains is to punch out the irritating liberal wimp in rimless glasses who has been popping up between orgies of bloodletting to condemn excessive violence. As Stanley Kauffmann noted last week, the movie ends with the printed message: "Patrons are warned not to imitate any of the stunts and action in this film."

Meanwhile, the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography is about to issue a report asserting that there is a "causal relationship" between pornography and violence. The commission has been entertaining the nation for the past year with its struggles to reach this preordained conclusion. A witness testified that the accidental discovery of a deck of dirty playing cards caused him to start stealing *Playboy* magazines and sexually abusing the family dog. Social scientists whose studies the commission has cited in support of its thesis have rushed to deny that their studies prove any such connection. These "scientific studies," in any event, consist of dubious exercises like showing porn films to college boys and then telling them to push a button to administer "pain" to another student.

No strained evidence or reasoning is needed in the case of *Cobra*, which directly advocates violence, glamorizes its practitioners, and sneers at those who oppose it. The story line, in which Stallone is a rogue cop and his victims are wanton criminals, is merely the thinnest veil over the pornography of violence. In fact, the movie's "moral"—that society is too easy on criminals—is as artificially attached to *Cobra* as the laughable sermonettes sometimes included in sexual porn movies to give them the legally required "redeeming social value." The movie's hypocrisy is brazen: the bloody violence of the bad guys is, if anything, more lovingly depicted than the bloody violence of the good guys. Their victims are ciphers (except for the one who escapes) and the audience's moral sense is intentionally numbed by the alternation of gory mayhem and lighthearted banter. The nonsensical plot and token characterization (also reminiscent of traditional porn) are further evidence that the movie's only purpose is the depiction of violence.

The Attorney General's Commission recognizes that the government cannot outlaw pornography, but it plans to "condemn" the distribution of magazines like *Playboy* and *Penthouse* and to offer guidelines for citizens' groups wishing to bring pressure on distributors. The executive director of the commission has already written to leading magazine outlets—on Justice Department stationery—to announce that "the Commission has received testimony alleging that your company is involved in the sale or distribution of pornography." The ostensible purpose was to give these companies an "opportunity to respond." ("Failure to respond will necessarily be accepted as an indication of no objection," the letter cheerily noted.) The effect, obviously intended, was that 7-Eleven, Peoples Drugs, and other large chains announced that as a result of "evidence" given to the commission, they would no longer carry *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and similar publications.

A commission study of the April 1986 issues of *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and six similar magazines concluded that .6 percent, or three out of 512, of "activities depicted" involved violence, force, or weapons. I don't think Sylvester Stallone movies should be banned, either. But I marvel at the cognitive dissonance that allows the Reagan administration to explore uncharted passages around the First Amendment in search of ways to stifle *Playboy* and *Penthouse*—ostensibly because of some connection to encouraging violence—while outright embracing Sylvester Stallone.

Stallone has been to the White House at least twice. Last October he was seated with Nancy Reagan and the guest of honor at a state dinner for Singapore prime minister Lee Kwan Yew. Asked his views on that month's hostage crisis, Stallone opined, "Let's put it this way. I'd like to have a little action." Earlier he attended a special White House screening of *Rocky III*.

President Reagan has virtually endorsed the Stallone cult of violence to suit his narrower political purposes. "After seeing *Rambo* last night, I'll know what to do next time," he said a year ago at the conclusion of the TWA hostage crisis. And: "Go ahead. Make my day," exploiting the only slightly less violent Clint Eastwood cult to fend off calls for a tax increase. Eastwood is another regular White House visitor, and has been appointed to a presidential arts commission. Reagan called to congratulate Eastwood when he was elected mayor of Carmel.

Attorney General Ed Meese has grandiosely declared that his Porn Commission "reflects the concern a healthy society must have regarding the ways in which its people publicly entertain themselves." The "purpose of a democracy involves not simply the functioning of its political system but also the achievement of . . . the good society." In other words, the government should concern itself with the nation's general moral tone—a defensible view, though an odd one coming from an administration that also moralizes regularly about getting the government off people's backs.

But it's one thing for political leaders to use the bully pulpit to help set a healthy moral tone. It's another thing for the government to impose its ideas of private morality on unwilling citizens. That's what's ominous about the Porn Commission's designs to make *Playboy* less accessible. However indirectly arranged, the purpose and effect of these designs is to prevent people from reading something they wish to read, because the government thinks it's bad for them.

What makes this exercise in quasi-censorship especially odious is its obvious insincerity. If the problem is violence, where are the Reagan administration's noncoercive tone-setting efforts? Which purveyor of public entertainment is doing more to promote violence, Hugh Hefner or Sylvester Stallone? But which one gets persecuted and which one gets invited to the White House?

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
JUNE 30, 1986

HERE COME THE DUDS

Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III was the first of President Reagan's nominees to the U.S. Court of Appeals to be rejected by the Senate. The 39-year-old U.S. attorney from Mobile, Alabama, won this dubious distinction by making some racially insensitive remarks—that the NAACP was "un-American," and that a white civil-rights lawyer was "a disgrace to his race"—and then waffling on whether he made the statements. Daniel Manion, a 44-year-old lawyer from South Bend, Indiana, may soon become the second Reagan nominee to be turned down, on the basis of intemperate remarks and inexperience. Manion barely survived the scrutiny of the Judiciary Committee, and he probably doesn't have enough support to pass the full Senate. Democratic senators Joe Biden and Paul Simon say that Manion and Sessions illustrate the declining quality of Reagan's appointments to the bench.

Conservatives in the Senate argue that Biden and Simon are being disingenuous when they raise the issue of quality. They charge that the liberals' real objection is to the ideological bent of Reagan's appointees, and that they hide their political objections behind a smoke screen of "qualifications." But under Reagan, competence has become a very real issue. The president's choices have taken a nosedive since the beginning of his second term, and more specifically, since Ed Meese was confirmed as attorney general. During his first four years in office, the American Bar Association gave 23 percent of Reagan's choices for the U.S. Court of Appeals its highest rating: exceptionally well qualified. Since the second inaugural, the ABA has only rated 11 percent so highly. A full half of the second-term nominees have received the ABA's lowest passing grade: qualified. In the first term, that number was 35 percent.

In Dan Manion, Meese is certainly scraping the bottom of the barrel. Manion's South Bend practice consists almost exclusively of personal injury and small-claims cases. He has never argued a case before the Seventh U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, to which he has been nominated. Of the small number of federal cases he has handled, none has involved constitutional issues. Manion has never published a legal paper or article.

The Chicago Council of Lawyers, an unaffiliated bar association, reviewed Manion's briefs and found them riddled with spelling and grammatical errors. The *Wall Street Journal* referred to the errors as "typos," and called Manion an "otherwise perfectly qualified nominee." That's ridiculous. One brief contains 18 spelling errors, including "perponderance" six times. The Chicago Council of Lawyers concluded that "the author seems to have no knowledge of when to use an apostrophe to make a noun possessive." And Manion's writing is tortured to the point of incoherence. He submitted these briefs as his five best.

You can't expect all lawyers to write like Justice Holmes. But even if Manion did, you wouldn't want him on the bench. In the Indiana State Senate, he worked to censor textbooks, and to promote the teaching of creation science. Shortly after the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional a Kentucky statute authorizing schools to post the Ten Commandments, Manion sponsored nearly identical legislation. He now calls that bill a "protest," but judges (and legislators) are sworn to uphold the Constitution, not demonstrate against it.

A number of Republican senators are arguing that it's wrong to vote against Reagan's nominees for such "ideological reasons." Orrin Hatch goes even further, attacking those who vote no for any reason. "These are very high-quality people, or they wouldn't be considered in the first place," Hatch said recently. The implication is that the Senate doesn't need to hold confirmation hearings at all. That wasn't the intent of the framers of the Constitution. The debate in Philadelphia in 1787 centered on whether the *president* should play any part in the selection of judges. The "advise and consent" clause was a compromise under which the president and the Senate were supposed to share equally the weighty responsibility. Until the 20th century, the Senate took its advisory role much more seriously, rejecting many judicial nominees.

You would think that liberals would use this argument to support their attack on extremist nominees. Not many do. During Judiciary Committee hearings, Senator Biden told Manion, "I think you are a decent and honorable man,

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but I do not think I can vote for you because of your political views." More recently, he told a *Wall Street Journal* reporter: "It isn't ideology, it's a question of knowledge of the law, competence, ability." Biden wants it both ways—to go after conservatives, but only on technical grounds, as a nonpartisan issue of merit.

Senator Simon is more thoughtful. In a speech at the National Press Club a few weeks ago, he said that objective evaluation of merit is insufficient, and called for hearings on how broad the Senate's role in judicial appointments should be. Hearings aren't going to resolve this perennial question, but they might help to dispel the pernicious notion that the Senate needs a smoking gun to reject a judicial nominee.

The Senate's rejection of Sessions and the widespread opposition to Manion are signs that lawmakers are tired of being a rubber stamp for the president. All presidents appoint judges who are politically compatible, but Reagan has made ideology virtually the sole qualification. This is the time for the Senate to forthrightly return to its more active historic role. Manion is easily brushed aside on the basis of his inexperience. But there's nothing wrong with voting against him because he doesn't understand the Bill of Rights. Why hide behind a cloak of "judicial temperament"? If conservatives demand more from judges nominated by our next Democratic president, he'll owe them a debt of thanks as well.

Israeli Cover-Up?

Prime Minister Shimon Peres is probably right in charging that some highly placed individuals in the U.S. government (and in the media too, by the way) want to use the espionage of Jonathan Jay Pollard to "foul the atmosphere" of unprecedented cooperation that now exists between Israel and America. There are always such people, including many who are usually indifferent to security breaches. What animates them on this occasion is not hard to figure out. But it would be dangerously self-deluding for Peres to think that only malice motivates the skepticism that has greeted his government's denials that there is more to Israeli spying against the U.S. than this one unauthorized instance.

The Israelis insist that Pollard's activities were a unique and "rogue" operation, unacceptable to the authorities. What makes this hard to believe is the way two of the four Israelis implicated in the Pollard case were treated when they returned to Jerusalem. Colonel Aviam Sella, a rising star of the air force, has been promoted to brigadier general and appointed commander of a major air base. Rafael Eitan, a veteran of Israel's highly touted secret service, has been appointed chairman of Israel Chemicals, a lucrative position at the head of one of the country's most important state enterprises.

This is hardly punishment, especially for something as serious as violating the implicit terms of trust that should govern the relations between Israel and its only reliable benefactor and supporter among the nations of the world. The United States deserves more from its ally than the disrespect for our sensibilities and our interests expressed in the Israeli government's unwillingness to make people pay for their misdeeds.

There are always extenuating personal circumstances. Eitan is one of the unsung heroes of Israel's long netherworld war against its ungentlemanly enemies; he was among those who apprehended Eichmann. Such a career, the Israelis will say, should not be undone by one overzealous act—if it was just one overzealous act. Sella is a brilliant military officer in a country inordinately dependent, alas, on its brilliant military officers. The cost of retiring him would be enormous. Maybe these considerations explain the almost indiscernibly slight rebuke administered to the two officials.

But the suspicion lingers that there were other factors, including the possibility that the compromised principals held the government hostage to their knowledge of other acts of espionage against the United States. This conjecture is no mean-spirited fantasy. Only last month, in the case of two Palestinian terrorists who died after being captured during the hijacking of a bus, the Peres Cabinet was inhibited by just this sort of blackmail from allowing its attorney general to pursue acts of perjury allegedly committed by another security agency. Such damage-control—rather, such blackmail—is especially effective if higher-ups were actually what we used to call "witty"—that is, if they actually knew of the operations about whose very existence they now feign surprise.

There is, then, something a bit too worldly-wise, too smart-alecky and wanton, in Jerusalem's official reactions to these two cases, and also in the case of still another Israeli general implicated in an illegal scheme to funnel American weapons to Iran. Such callousness about law and lawlessness, trustworthiness and treachery, may be endemic even to democracies habituated to living under siege. But that should comfort neither Israel nor its friends. The Pollard case was not even admirable in a technical sense. The spy was a loose-lipped braggart who would be trusted only by people who think themselves too smart or too favored by fate to be found out.

It is particularly disheartening that the erosion of official ethics in Israel should come on the Labor Party's watch, although Labor is hardly a free agent in the present power-sharing arrangement. The imminent return of Yitzhak Shamir of the conservative Likud Party to the prime ministry augurs even worse for these standards. Shamir and some of his Likud colleagues are men without the scruples demanded of democratic leadership. Many of them are thugs. This, they may think, prepares them well for living in the Arab Middle East. But it does not equip them for the deeper kind of alliance with the United States, to which Israelis aspire and which, at their best, they richly deserve.

Even in imperfect circumstances, Israel is a valuable strategic asset of the United States. Both its state of military preparedness and its proven political commitments make Israel in any imaginable contingency a more certain ally

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than any NATO country—even Margaret Thatcher's United Kingdom. Moreover, the valuable information we get from Israeli intelligence is not rivaled by the fruits of any other intelligence-sharing relationship.

What the Israelis apparently were after in the Pollard case was not material on our arms or arms control positions vis-à-vis Russia or China. They were after information we possessed that might be critically relevant to Israel's security, such as the quantity and quality of Soviet weapons deployed in the Arab confrontation states. But much of this we provide anyway, and everybody knows it. Still, one reason that neither the State Department nor the Pentagon was eager to see a Pollard trial was their reluctance to demonstrate in open court just how much we spy on our putative Arab friends—which would show, inter alia, just how much of what we know about the Arabs is also now known by the Israelis.

Of course, we also probably spy on the Israelis. This raises the question as to why they're not entitled to do in the U.S. what we presumably do in Israel. The answer is that the relationship is in no way symmetrical. Our ties to Israel are based on conviction and preference. Israel's ties to us are based on necessity—rooted philosophical and political affinities notwithstanding, in their objective, desperate needs. The U.S. has been more than understanding and more than supportive of these needs and of Israel's own definition of them. This American support creates certain prerogatives for the U.S. It also creates certain obligations for Israel, and one of these is that it behave with scrupulous honor and honesty to its friend.

THE AUSTRIAN EXAMPLE

Like the referendum ratifying the Nazi Anschluss in 1938, the election of June 8 was a referendum on the Austrians themselves. Fifty-four percent of them chose as their president Kurt Waldheim, a man cited as a war criminal by the Yugoslav War Crimes Commission, by the U.S. Army's Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects, and by the U.N. War Crimes Commission.

The electoral campaign was marked by mendacity and arrogance. Those who dared to point out that Waldheim had lied, carefully and elaborately, for 40 years—something even Waldheim does not deny—were denounced by him and his supporters for their "slanders" and "lies." Special vilification was reserved for the World Jewish Congress, which never made a charge without documentation. Waldheim, on the other hand, never produced a single document in refutation, only his unsupported assertions and the character references he produced among his co-veterans. Austrian anti-Semitism needed no great encouragement and caused no embarrassment.

There has been a change of tone since the election. The editor of the Viennese daily *Die Presse*, who some weeks ago said that "the Jews should mind their own business" (if discovering who may have helped to murder Jews is not "their own business," what is?), now calls for Austrian "diplomatic initiative" to smooth Mr. Waldheim's way. Michael Graff, leader of the People's Party, who for three months attacked the World Jewish Congress for its "defamation," has suddenly assumed an attitude of conciliation. But this should not obscure the character of the Waldheim campaign, which was so successfully attuned to the character of the Austrian body politic. On June 6, for example, in Amstetten, a group of protesters was attacked by Waldheim supporters. The police stood by as the anti-Waldheim group was beaten up, and then took down the names, not of the attackers, but of the victims. From an elevated platform and pointing at the protesters, according to James Markham of the *New York Times*, "Waldheim raised his long fingers in a spectral gesture that has become one of his campaign trademarks and intoned: 'So here you see an example of the abuse of Western democratic liberties.' "

The war crimes charges formally made against Waldheim in the immediate postwar period do not include what has subsequently been discovered. They are not based on his performance in the infamous anti-partisan campaigns in the Balkans. They are not based on his certain knowledge of the deportation of thousands of Jews from the Greek city of Salonika (he was in Salonika just after the first major anti-Jewish actions, as the persecutions increased, as the deportations began, and as they came to a close), or on the role he played in the roundup of Jews elsewhere in Greece. They are not based on his reports of prisoner interrogations or of S.S. roundups. They are not based on his having been in charge of sinister "special tasks" for the intelligence unit attached to the High Command. The Yugoslav war crimes charges pertain only to the period after April 1944. They are based on testimony of several witnesses who, unknown to each other, corroborated one another's specific and detailed accusations. At the very least, Waldheim proposed reprisal murders of civilians. The leader of the Kozane-Strip atrocity, Captain Egberts-Hilker, went further. He said the order for the murders, and the burning of three villages, came from Lieutenant Kurt Waldheim. If Waldheim has evidence that Egberts-Hilker (who freely admitted his own guilt) lied in December 1947, he has yet to prove it.

Waldheim is a specific case of a general phenomenon: the suspected war criminal who goes unpunished. Most have died, like Mengele, without ever having suffered. Some live on still, not only in South America and Syria, but also in Los Angeles and Detroit. Many never had to leave their comfortable existences in Austria and Germany. One of these was bound to rise higher than any of the others: that man turned out to be Kurt Waldheim.

Waldheim's election has been welcomed by the Soviet Union, which has denounced his accusers as "Zionists and their patrons in Washington." According to a former Yugoslav intelligence agent, the Soviets were told in late 1947

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or 1948 that Waldheim was wanted as a war criminal. Waldheim was an official in the Austrian foreign ministry in 1956 during the Hungarian revolution, and tried to close Austria's borders to Hungarian refugees. Waldheim was Austrian foreign minister in 1968, when the Red Army invaded Czechoslovakia, and instructed the Austrian ambassador in Prague not to allow any Czechs into the Austrian Embassy. In 1971, when he first ran for secretary-general of the U.N., Waldheim was stoutly supported by the Soviet Union, and that support never wavered throughout his tenure, when the organization became, for the West, a kangaroo court.

Throughout the campaign Waldheim's supporters insisted that "we will elect whom *we* want." By this they meant that any charges brought by foreigners (especially Jewish ones), no matter how terrible the accusation or how extensive the evidence, would simply be disregarded. And so it was. Now it is our turn to judge the 54 percent of the Austrian electorate that voted for Waldheim. And we may judge them as *we* want, by our standards of truth and morality, and not by the apparently very different ones held by so many in Austria.

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

FREE LUNCH FANS

DONALD T. REGAN, the White House chief of staff, is good at cheap bravado. During a senior staff meeting one morning in early June, he announced that, contrary to a report in the *Washington Post*, the Reagan administration hadn't abandoned its proposal to eliminate the Small Business Administration. It will fight on, he indicated, against the SBA in an effort to slash federal spending and streamline the government.

This is nonsense. After 18 months the administration is no closer to killing off the SBA. If anything, the agency is in a stronger position than ever, since its supporters in the so-called iron triangle—Congress, the bureaucracy, and the special-interest community—are now fully mobilized. Too bad. The SBA richly deserves elimination.

Created in 1953, it has the seemingly uncontroversial job of aiding small businesses, particularly those run by minorities, that are short on money and business skills. Its tools are loans, loan guarantees, and advice. In fact, it doesn't transform the poor into entrepreneurs or help small businesses challenge big ones. Its budget this year is $934 million, but it furthers no public policy. Aside from the federal contracts that are "set aside" by the agency for minorities, women and blacks profit little from the SBA's programs. Instead it has become a source of pork barrel, a "petty cash drawer for members of Congress," in the words of Howard Kurtz of the *Washington Post*. For example, the SBA funds "small business development centers" at universities in the states of 18 of the 19 members of the Senate Small Business Committee.

Its loan programs are a scandal. Republican bigwigs have abused it: Richard Richards, the GOP national chairman from 1981 to 1983, and Gerald Carmen, the former head of the Government Services Administration, were delinquent on loan payments in Reagan's first term. Those who have qualified in recent years as "disadvantaged"—and thus eligible for SBA loans at a three percent interest rate—include an Asian-American doctor with a Mercedes and an annual income of more than $200,000, a black with a master's degree in finance and a net worth of $1.2 million, and a well-educated Hispanic who runs an insulation company and has a net worth of $2.4 million.

According to John Bennett of Scripps Howard newspapers, under SBA's minority loan program Donald Nixon, a nephew of former president Richard Nixon, got $45,000, with which he bought a gold mine. The *Los Angeles Times* found numerous applicants who would seek bank loans at below-market interest rates knowing they'd be turned down. Then they would take the letters of refusal to the SBA and get cut-rate loans. Of course many loans are never repaid. In 1985 the agency swallowed $275 million in defaults and liquidations. That was a good year. This year $417 million in defaults and liquidations are expected. "But who knows how much it will really be," an SBA official says blithely.

Why can't a president as ostensibly effective as Reagan get rid of the SBA? One reason is that much of his conservative constituency likes the agency. Many Republicans who talk about shaving back the federal government go limp on the subject of the SBA. They've found that boasting about the federal contracts that are put in minority hands is a painless way of showing they are concerned about blacks. More abstractly, who wants to be labeled a foe of small business? Not many politicians, including Reagan. He has praised "the jobs created and retained, the economic gains, and, yes, the additional taxes" generated by small business programs.

When Reagan proposed elimination of the SBA in January 1985, not one of the 53 Republican senators stepped forward to sponsor legislation to that effect. This year five GOP senators (plus one Democrat) did, but Republican leaders are not pushing the bill. Why should they? The White House may say it's for killing the SBA, but Reagan never demonizes it in his speeches. He scarcely mentions it. This is no accident. Polling conducted for the White House found that small business is the most popular institution or person in the country. "Small business beats everything, even Ronald Reagan, who was second," says a White House official.

THE MAN BEHIND the bid to snuff out the SBA was not Reagan, but David Stockman, who was budget director until last summer. In late 1984, he writes in *The Triumph of Politics*, he scoured the budget "for spending cuts that would not poison the political environment or violate ironclad presidential commitments." The SBA, he says, "could be attacked on principle." It was, in the fiscal 1986 budget.

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The costly loan programs would be ended, and the SBA's other functions—ombudsman for small business, procuring federal contracts for minorities, the 12,000-strong Service Corps of Retired Executives—would be shifted to the Commerce Department.

In early 1985 Stockman finagled support for the measure. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce wanted to keep the SBA alive while ending its loan programs, but Stockman persuaded Richard Rahn, the chamber's vice president and chief economist, to go along with elimination. Stockman told him that quibbling over the SBA's fate might jeopardize the entire $50 billion package of spending cuts. The chamber, which favored most of the cuts, endorsed the package. A few weeks later, Stockman worked out a different deal with John Sloan of the National Federation of Independent Business. In effect, he agreed to the proposal originally made by Rahn: preserve the SBA as an independent agency, but kill the loan program. Rahn was furious when he discovered he'd been double-crossed by Stockman. "I don't think I've ever sworn at a Cabinet level officer as I did that day," Rahn says. He did wangle a prize, though. Stockman, chagrined, quickly arranged to have both Reagan and Vice President George Bush attend the chamber's annual meeting.

TO SOLIDIFY his pact with the administration, Sloan was granted a personal meeting with Reagan. Still, the deal fell through. Stockman and Senate Republican leaders found themselves short of votes in spring 1985 for a budget resolution with deep spending cuts. Something had to go, and Senator Lowell Weicker, the Republican chairman of the Small Business Committee, was bent on protecting the SBA. Stockman had already clashed bitterly with Weicker on the subject. He spent days putting together copiously detailed testimony denouncing the SBA's loan practices before Weicker's committee. It "reallocates funds away from more creditworthy firms to less creditworthy firms," Stockman said. Most of the loans go to firms in the crowded retail, wholesale, and service sectors, thus exacerbating the plight of struggling small businesses. "Millions of taxpaying small businesses face unneeded and uneconomic competition from bureaucratic clients who can't compete profitably, or at all, on a level playing field," he insisted. Weicker was unimpressed. Later, to get his vote for the budget resolution, Stockman relented and agreed to keep the SBA alive, in full flower.

Stockman's successor as budget director, James Miller, revived the death-to-the-SBA proposal in this year's budget. Few take him seriously on this, even at the White House. "You can't expect conservatives to declare themselves enthusiastically for this after what happened last year," says an administration official. "There are lots of them in Congress who agree with us on the SBA, but they say it's an uphill battle, so why fight it? Besides, they're convinced the administration will back off again and leave them out on a limb." Nor do they want to squabble with the phalanx of interest groups with a stake in the SBA's survival—National Small Business Association, Small Business United, Minority Association of Small Business Investment Companies, etc.

The administration took one bold step at the SBA in 1986, replacing administrator James Sanders, who wanted to preserve the agency, with Charles Heatherly, a capable conservative. Heatherly was named acting administrator in April, thus maintaining the fiction that the SBA might soon expire. He riled its allies his first day by firing six of the ten regional directors. White House officials were irritated at Heatherly's rashness, but they stuck by him when Weicker accused him of dismantling the agency. Employees at the SBA's Washington headquarters knew better and stayed calm. "They'd figured out nothing is really going to happen," says Heatherly.

Regan and budget officials still contend that the administration is intent upon eliminating the SBA. But a slow retreat has begun. The first move came in May, when officials quietly notified congressional leaders that they would concentrate on ending the wasteful loan programs, not on killing the SBA. Yet they know that Congress doesn't have any intention of terminating them either. "We're in a hopeless position," says a senior budget official. "We just don't have any support," adds a White House aide.

How will we know the White House has thrown in the towel? The signal will come when the White House nominates a permanent administrator for the SBA. In August the White House Conference on Small Business will be held in Washington with several thousand delegates, many of them on record in favor of retaining the SBA. "It ought to be a very positive affair," says a White House official. He notes that the delegates are to discuss the litigation explosion, Davis-Bacon, the line item veto, and tax reform. But the White House is fearful the SBA's fate will overshadow these issues. "To have a secondary, mostly symbolic, issue black out the bright sun would be dumb," the official says. Given this thinking, the smart thing is to knuckle under and nominate a new administrator. Stranger things have happened.

FRED BARNES

The army and the underclass.

LOSING BATTLE

IMAGINE THE U.S. military as a huge automobile dealership. The new weapons are up front in the showroom. The Pentagon's pitchmen, known in the trade as Program Managers, stand ready to extol the joys of high lethality through high technology. "Force multiplication," they call it, which offers the comforting assurance of "qualitative superiority in a target-rich environment." The sticker prices are as inflated as the rhetoric. If automobile prices since World War II had increased as much as sophisticated weapons, the average new car today would cost $300,000.

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Out back are the maintenance bays where the troops are to be found. Unlike defense hardware, they are a genuine bargain. First-year pay and allowances for a new recruit come to about $10,000, or $5.50 an hour. And just as the service department can make or break a dealership, in war people—not machines—are the key factor in combat success.

When the Israelis shot down 80 Syrian MiGs in 1982, the Pentagon claimed that half the kills were from radar-guided Sparrow missiles. Not so. As in all previous air wars, pilot superiority made the difference. The British found the quality of their men to be the overwhelming factor in their Falklands victory. Major General T. A. Boam of the Scots Guards cites the example of the corporal who assumed command of his battalion when the commanding officer was killed, successfully leading the assault on Tumbledown Mountain until he, too, was killed.

In this country, the one bright spot in the Reagan defense buildup is manpower. The All-Volunteer Force has brought about a dramatic shift in the quality of the American enlisted man. He is better motivated, better educated, and smarter than the draftees of little more than a decade ago. In fact, almost all of the dire predictions about the volunteer military have been confounded. When Nixon administration officials were trying to sell a skeptical Congress on the idea of a volunteer army in 1970, Senator Strom Thurmond scoffed, "The only way you're going to get an army that big is to draft it."

There were indeed modest declines in strength following the end of the draft in 1972. However, in large measure they were part of the so-called "Vietnam dividend," the reduction in the burden of defense promised following U.S. withdrawal from the Vietnam War. Active volunteer strength has never dropped below two million. In 1979, when the armed services first failed to achieve 100 percent of their recruiting goals, they still enlisted more people than in the previous year. And, contrary to the skeptics' predictions, the services have not become havens for the uneducated or the last refuge of otherwise unemployed minorities. Since 1980 the services have signed up a greater share of high school graduates than in the youth population at large—nine out of ten, compared to about seven out of ten for their civilian brethren.

The troops are unquestionably smarter. The military used to accept thousands from the so-called mental Category IV, those scoring in the bottom third on the standard entrance test. And as far as minorities are concerned, the military is taking slightly more blacks and fewer Hispanics than in the 18- to 24-year-old population at large. The force is about as ethnically "representative" today as any deliberate bureaucratic tinkering could have achieved.

THE VOLUNTEER military has not always been in such good shape. In 1980 it was nearly dead in the water and close to capsizing. Seasoned regulars were leaving in droves. Raw recruits were no substitute for the loss of experience, and their performance was spotty, at best. The Reagan administration claims its pay raises of 1981 and 1982 averted the impending disaster. Perhaps—if we accept the assumption of labor economists that the supply of military manpower is a function of one variable: money. But pay has never been competitive with the private sector. Given the current pay scale, the services should be experiencing massive problems, yet they are doing better than ever. Some correlate the rise in enlistment rates with a rise in youth unemployment. Yet according to Larry Korb, the Pentagon's former manpower chief, in 1979, when male teenage unemployment was 16 percent, the Army still failed to achieve its recruiting goal.

MY OWN belief is that nothing succeeds like quality. In 1980 there were rosy statistics pouring out of the Pentagon's computers. Yet field commanders complained that they were seeing an entirely different population. The troops were washing out of training at unexpectedly high rates. They deserted frequently, and commanders were no longer commanding. In the words of one former regimental commander, the officers had become "problem facilitators" for troops unable and frequently unwilling to adapt. Not surprisingly, reenlistment rates plummeted during the same period. The poor quality in the lower ranks was driving more experienced people out. One Marine captain explained, "No real man can take pride in being part of a mob."

Then a few officers in the Marines' Operations Analysis Group discovered the entrance test was flawed. More than a quarter-million enlistees entered the service from 1977 through 1980 with inflated scores. When the test results were adjusted, the services were horrified to discover the percent of Category IV recruits wasn't anywhere near the five or six percent claimed by the Pentagon. In 1980 it was over 30 percent. The military had inadvertently signed up proportionately more unqualified people than at any time in history.

The Defense Department quickly streamlined discharge procedures to weed out chronic poor performers. More important, standards were tightened by issuing new entrance tests to recruiters. In the first year after distribution of the upgraded tests, the fraction of "below-average" recruits fell by half. By fiscal year 1985 the share had fallen to one-fourth of the 1980 peak. Reenlistment rates went up by 15 percent. Today the volunteer military has all the attributes of a truly professional standing military: quality, experience, and stability.

We should be wary of turning back. Studies going back to World War II of the American fighting man show that more intelligent, better-educated men not only make better fighters, they live longer in combat. Moreover, the military has made a colossal bet that high technology wins wars. The wager is debatable, but a capital investment of over a trillion dollars' worth of hardware is not going to be dispensed with overnight.

To maintain and operate its increasingly esoteric systems, the military now supports a greater variety of training. There are over 1,100 separate training pipelines, up 16 percent from a decade ago. Nor is the course work simple rote instruction. Learning to repair the tracks on the M-1 tank is considered equivalent in difficulty to a first-year college

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course. AEGIS cruiser fire controlmen, the men who maintain and operate the ships' air defense systems, spend 27 months in school, more time than is required to train a carrier-qualified jet pilot. To maintain the Army's M-1 tank, mechanics must master 61,000 pages of technical manuals. There is a veritable encyclopedia of maintenance publications, totaling 300,000 pages, for the Navy's F-14 interceptor. High school dropouts aren't going to run these systems.

There are definite implications here for those tempted to use the military as a vehicle for social rehabilitation—a kind of "armed job corps," as defense analyst Jeffrey Record puts it. First, in order to help the disadvantaged, the armed services would have to lower their entrance standards. The out-of-work high school dropouts are the same young men who cannot qualify for military service. Pentagon file cabinets are full of studies showing that high school graduates make better troops; they come to the military with a demonstrated ability to stick to a program. Dropouts from high school tend to wash out of the military's costly training programs. Although the military's entrance examination is not a precise predictor of future performance, it too serves as a rough measure of "trainability." Low-scoring aspirants do not do as well in training as the higher-scoring ones.

Second, the military as a uniformed version of CETA would involve shorter enlistment terms of one- or two-year hitches. The average first-term enlistment today is for just about four years, with benefits all along the manpower pipeline: relatively more time in the operating forces after training, more unit cohesion, and less turnover. Two-year enlistments will push the services back to the astronomically high turnover rates of the draft era, with fewer experienced people to operate today's more complex systems.

Third, the two-year enlistees wouldn't be likely to receive training in the kinds of technical skills that would make them most employable in the private sector. Those skills—avionics, computer programming, and such—involve longer training times. The military understandably desires maximum return on the training investment, which is why it guarantees such training only in return for longer enlistments. With plenty of highly qualifed, long-service volunteers, the two-year people are going to be shunted into more pedestrian pursuits, such as supply, described by one disgruntled troop as "little more than box stacking and skivvy counting." The experience is likely to be more embittering than elevating.

IN FACT, the consequences of such a program are well documented. In August 1966 then-defense secretary Robert S. McNamara launched Project 100,000, with the express purpose of giving unqualified youths a boost through military training and service into the civilian job market.

Entrance standards were lowered, and the program's name derived from the goal of 100,000 so-called "New Standards" men a year. The armed services were enjoined to take more men in mental Category IV, specifically from the bottom half of this group (Category IVB), those falling between the tenth and 15th percentiles on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. These were men who previously would not have qualified for military service, either as volunteers or draftees.

IT WAS HOPED the participants would render a "fully satisfactory" performance after exposure to the military's highly structured training, and subsequently lead "more productive lives" upon return to civilian life. The program was also loftily described as offering "a more equitable sharing of the opportunities and obligations for military service among the Nation's youth." In other words, the program would conveniently spread the impact of rising draft calls needed to support the Vietnam buildup.

The results were neither satisfactory nor equitable. The "New Standards" men flunked out of basic training at twice the usual rate, were court-martialed and dismissed with premature discharges twice as often. Among cynics in the Pentagon, the program was soon dubbed "McNamara's Moron Corps." With a median reading ability at the sixth grade and 14 percent of them reading below the fourth-grade level, the Project 100,000 men were simply unable to absorb the kind of training that leads most directly to post-service jobs. Academic failures among the token few "New Standards" men sent to Air Force electronics training soared to 40 percent—ten times the normal rate.

The services tried remedial reading development before skill training. No good. The Project 100,000 youths failed Army and Navy electronics, communications, medical technician, and mechanical repair courses at anywhere from four to seven times the rate for other men in the same courses.

The program failed the test of its key assumption: the services could train virtually anyone. They couldn't. "The project was doomed from the beginning," says Jim Marsh, a manpower expert at Headquarters Marine Corps, "because no extra assets to do the job were provided. The whole thing was premised on the belief the services were overresearched in training and manpower." He argues that during the Vietnam War buildup the case was the exact reverse.

But Project 100,000 was a spectacular failure for a more subtle reason than simple lack of resources. The standards had been reduced only halfway. They were lowered to accommodate general entry into the armed services, but the hurdles for entry into the military's technical schools after basic training were left intact. Only the most qualified were sent off to technical training. The rest were shunted into occupations the Pentagon euphemistically calls "soft-skill" areas: supply, food service, and, most importantly, the infantry.

Wild inequities resulted. The burden of fighting the Vietnam War was not shared by a greater cross section of American society. In the first three years of the program, almost half of the Army's share of Project 100,000 men, and well over half of the Marine Corps' share, was assigned to the combat arms. In 1968 fully 70 percent of the Marine Corps' Project 100,000 participants were assigned to combat specialties.

The results were consistent with the combat mortality of low-quality troops in previous wars. A recruit in the men-

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tal Category IVB who entered the Marine Corps in 1968 was two-and-a-half times more likely to die in combat than Category I and II troops. The least capable were sent to do some of the heaviest fighting.

"It might not have been a disaster if there had not been a war," asserts retired Marine lieutenant colonel Bill Corson. "They should have been treated as sole surviving sons," he says, thereby excusing them from combat. They weren't. And because they were not, critics of Project 100,000 maintain to this day that it was never intended to provide a socially uplifting experience through vocational training. According to Corson, "They were cannon fodder, pure and simple." Bernard Nalty, an Air Force historian, concludes, "Project 100,000 resulted in an infusion of manpower that helped forestall the mobilization of the National Guard and reserve, which provided a haven for draft-age men, the majority of them whites."

For those who survived the experience, did Project 100,000 provide a way out of the backwaters of ignorance and unemployment? Impossible to tell. The Pentagon never conducted a survey of what happened after they left the military. Asked why not, given the hundreds of other arcane studies the Pentagon commissions annually, Marsh says there was little incentive to find out: "Hell, we were just glad to see 'em leave."

Remedial vocational training, in short, raises questions about the effectiveness of the force. If more quality and intensive training is the fastest way to increase preparedness, then an influx of people unable to absorb the training is perhaps the quickest way to undermine it. The armed services can be "problem facilitators" or an effective fighting force. But not both.

DAVID EVANS

David Evans is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps. His opinions are not necessarily those of the Department of Defense.

Guatemala's civilian government faces the enemy within.

BUREAUCRACY OF DEATH

BY ALLAN NAIRN AND JEAN-MARIE SIMON

ON THE SURFACE, Guatemala, the largest country in Central America, appears placid. There are fewer houses ringed with sandbags than in Nicaragua, fewer armed men in the streets than in El Salvador, and six months ago the country elected its first civilian president since 1966, Christian Democrat Vinicio Cerezo. His administration has launched an anticorruption campaign and the country's first public-sector jobs program in more than a decade. But in this apparently hopeful atmosphere, union members, religious leaders, peasant activists, and other potential opponents of the Guatemalan military still face the constant threat of violence from their government.

In February Cerezo said that the country was experiencing a resurgence of political killings and noted that 69 cadavers, many of them showing signs of torture, had appeared during his first three weeks in office. In March the secretary of a Christian Democratic youth group was gunned down in his house along with his father and his sister. In April two refugees disappeared after they were dragged from a parish house where they were living under the protection of a Catholic bishop. In May, Victor Hugo Godoy, a member of the Congress's human rights commission, said that "it is very easy to recognize the same practices of years ago, including not just torture, but also the infamous coup de grace." On May 30 seven bodies appeared in one day on the streets of Guatemala City. Over the last six months, killings not attributed to combat or common crime have been running at more than 60 per month.

How to confront this ongoing terror is the primary challenge facing Guatemala's newly elected government. The victims are not killed by what is sometimes called "senseless violence" or by "the cycle of violence between left and right." They are killed by an efficient system of political terrorism. At the heart of this system is the intelligence apparatus of the Guatemalan military, known by its bureaucratic label, G-2. The G-2 is the unelected government of Guatemala that Vinicio Cerezo must find a way to control.

Cerezo is Guatemala's first chief of state in 20 years who would not order the killing of an unarmed civilian. He has a reformer's past and has survived three assassination attempts by the army he now nominally commands. But he serves at the sufferance of what is still the most murderous army in the Western Hemisphere. Although such estimates can't be precise, the archbishop of Guatemala, Próspero Penados, says that Cerezo holds 25 percent of the

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power. Cerezo himself claims 30 percent, and says that he will build from there.

From the start of his campaign, Cerezo pledged to limit the goals of his presidency. "My government will not plan social reforms," he stated bluntly, "because the army would oppose it." He promised to refrain from land reform and the prosecution of army officers for prior political murders. In return, he expected to be permitted to serve out his term, and said he would abolish the Department of Technical Investigations (DIT), a band of civilian thugs who killed and abducted on orders from G-2 and pillaged on their own account. The army agreed, and forged a tactical alliance with the man they had once reviled. The G-2, which is normally circumspect, even put the alliance on paper. Cerezo read us a confidential G-2 memo written before the December election predicting that the Christian Democrats would win "due to the links they have forged with the army, as well as with the United States."

Once in office, Cerezo fulfilled his campaign pledge. In a spectacular raid the DIT staff was apprehended en masse. It was the third time in Guatemala's last six administrations that this infamous corps had been purged. Almost 200 agents were fired, 400 were sent to a remedial police training course, and one was arrested on a weapons charge and subsequently released.

In the meantime, the military had taken steps to assure that its power could not be challenged by the new government. Four days before Cerezo's inauguration, the outgoing chief of state, General Oscar Mejía Víctores, issued a series of sweeping decrees that stunned Cerezo's hopeful supporters. The measures narrowed civilian authority and legalized military control in the countryside, where the army is fighting a counterinsurgency war against a small guerrilla movement. One of the decrees created a State Security Council to handle aspects of national security that might fall under the jurisdiction of civilian Cabinet officers. Military officers serve on this council along with the civilian ministers, and their joint decisions are administered by the head of the council—who is required by the terms of the decree to be the army's secretary of intelligence. Another decree prohibited Cerezo from prosecuting any military officers for political crimes committed in the last four years.

ALTHOUGH CEREZO faces growing pressure to hold the armed forces accountable for their violence, he has been unable to comply. When Christian Democrats at the grass-roots level began joining the call for repeal of the amnesty decree earlier this year, Cerezo quickly squelched the move. This spring he announced that a commission would begin working on June 30 to investigate the thousands of disappearances, but was publicly pessimistic about its chances of getting access to secret army information. On June 5 he indefinitely postponed plans for the commission.

Meanwhile, the country's only human rights organization, the Mutual Support Group (GAM), is growing by the day. Modeled after the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the GAM is led by a group of courageous women whose husbands and children have disappeared. The GAM has publicly called for an accounting of the missing and for trials, such as those held in Argentina in 1985, of the officers responsible. Relations with Cerezo are becoming increasingly strained. In March he urged the GAM to "stop being masochistic and forget the past."

The army is confident that it has prevailed. "Do you think we've left behind any evidence?" one colonel taunted a journalist, demanding to be quoted. "In Argentina there are witnesses, there are books, there are films, there is proof. Here in Guatemala there is none of that. Here there are no survivors." This belief is widely shared in Guatemala and in Washington. But, inconveniently for many, it is not true. In fact, there are survivors and people on the inside who will talk, including high-ranking officers and the street-level killers they command. There are still many obstacles to justice for the Guatemalan military, but lack of evidence is not among them.

"WE ARE IN a war," explained Colonel Edgar Djalma, a G-2 veteran who served as army spokesman for most of the time from 1979 to 1984. "If under that concept it means that the government has an apparatus dedicated to finding and eliminating people of the left, to me that is perfectly normal." Djalma said that "a government can use all existing forces: the army, the police, the treasury police. . . . Each chief of government may look to another repressive apparatus or create his own." The point, he stressed, is the importance of G-2 coordination. He showed us a 1980 memo in which he wrote: "In the first phase, the intelligence section should be used above all prior to repressive actions or clean-up operations."

Djalma's matter-of-fact description is confirmed by General Benedicto Lucas García, the flamboyant and blunt former army chief of staff and brother of an ex-president. "If the G-2 wants to kill you they kill you," Benedicto told us. "They send out one of their trucks with a hit squad, and that's it." Benedicto says he knows that when his brother, General Romeo Lucas García, was president from 1978 to 1982, the government was responsible for at least 70 percent of the assassinations and disappearances.

Benedicto blamed some of the violence on common criminals and the guerrillas. The insurgents, organized in three major groups, have several thousand armed combatants operating primarily in remote rural areas. "When they've eliminated people," Benedicto said, "they've said so." Last year one Western intelligence official told us that the guerrillas "have been selective. They direct their killings toward the army, security forces, and, to a lesser extent, the civil patrols." The State Department's most recent human rights report estimated that the guerrillas had assassinated 59 military officials and 33 members of the civil defense forces last year. There were a total of 304 "civilian non-combatant deaths" in the entire country in 1985 (fewer than reported by Amnesty International, the Organization of American States, and other human rights

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groups), according to the State Department. The report included accounts attributing 28 of these killings to the guerrillas.

Benedicto claims that most of the killings during his brother's administration were directed by his brother's top aides, not by Romeo Lucas himself. But Raul García Granados, a cousin of the Lucas brothers and Romeo Lucas's chief adviser, makes no attempt to avoid responsibility. He explained to us that "the death squads were organized under the patronage and the approval of the government and the army, because it was the only way to fight guerrillas. The [death squads] have the sympathy of most of the Guatemalan people. They have lists of people that are suspected to be communists of whatever kind," he said, "and they kill them."

The lists and the philosophy behind them date back to 1954, when a CIA-sponsored invasion overthrew the left-leaning government of Jacobo Arbenz, which instituted a land reform program and was supported by the communists. The army sifted through the confiscated membership records of labor, peasant, and professional groups that had supported Arbenz, and classified 70,000 people as communists. During the 1960s dossiers from the updated files were used by the armed forces to destroy a left-wing guerrilla movement and other opponents. In 1968 *Time* magazine reported the chief of the U.S. military mission, Colonel John Webber, as saying that paramilitary groups run by the army were "licensed to kill peasants whom they considered guerrillas or 'potential guerrillas.' " By 1979 the National Police were brazen enough to issue a press release announcing that between January and October of that year "1,224 criminals" had been killed by El Escuadron de la Muerte (the Death Squad), and 3,252 "subversives" by the Ejército Secreto Anticómmunista (Secret Anticommunist Army). Throughout the early 1980s the army's top officers continued their assault on those they defined as the enemies of national security. In 1983 chief of state General Mejía Víctores condemned the Guatemalan priesthood for "advocating totalitarian doctrines." Twenty-four hours later Father Augusto Ramírez Monasterio, a Franciscan superior, was shot in the back as he fled an armed forces van that had followed him from his mother's house.

THIS IS THE military of which Cerezo, as commander in chief, now ostensibly has control. In a series of recent interviews, a veteran of the high command who has held senior army posts since 1978 described how the Guatemalan system works today. Western intelligence officials and other high-ranking Guatemalan officers have offered similar accounts. This officer says that each of the country's military bases has a G-2 office whose function is "the elimination of individuals." These offices report to the G-2 control center in the National Palace. The G-2 in turn is overseen by the Army General Staff and ultimately by the minister of defense. Altogether G-2 employs more than 2,000 agents nationwide, including about 100 full-time officers. The G-2 staff can also call on the resources of any branch of the army and security forces.

"There's an archive and computer file on journalists, students, leaders, people of the left, politicians, and so on," the officer says. This archive is maintained in the G-2 offices on the fourth-floor terrace of the National Palace, with copies in the adjacent Presidential Annex. "The file will say where the person was born, what party he belongs to, and the most important incidents of his life. One, for example, will say: '1957, participated in such and such a worker's movement; 1960, went into exile for the following reason; 1972, returned to Guatemala; 1975, participated in demonstration in the university. And finally, died on such and such a date.' It never says who was responsible."

The bureaucratic procedures for approving the killing of a dissident are well-established. "A local military commander has someone they think is a problem," the officer explains. "So they speak with G-2, and G-2 consults its own archives and information from its agents and the police and, if all coincide, it passes along a direct proposition to the minister of defense. They say, 'We have analyzed the case of such and such a person in depth and this person is responsible for the following acts and we recommend that we execute them.' "

The G-2 officers can also make their own recommendations. "There is a weekly meeting of the chiefs of the General Staff, and they do an analysis of the [political] situation which is presented to the chief of staff," the officer says. "They give a political appreciation. Such and such a union is moving, who's behind it, who is the head. Then the decision is taken, 'All right, we'll proceed.' "

PROMINENT POLITICAL dissidents get special consideration. "When there is a big fish, G-2 makes a presentation, they review all the problems with the person, the objective of the mission, and their recommendation. They can give three options—disappear them, eliminate them in public, or simply invite them to leave the country. . . ." During the regime of General Mejía, for example, army chief of staff Rodolfo Lobos Zamora, presidential chief of staff Pablo Nuila Hub, and Mejía himself often presided at the meetings, according to this officer and others.

At high-level meetings such as these, the military decided in 1979 to assassinate the country's two leading democratic politicians. The first was Alberto Fuentes Mohr, the former foreign minister. He was machine-gunned to death as he drove by a military base in Guatemala City shortly after registering his new Social Democratic Party. Two months later, Manuel Colóm Argueta, the charismatic former mayor of the capital, was slain in downtown traffic while a helicopter hovered overhead. Only one week earlier, Colóm Argueta had registered his own new center-left political party.

Colonel Djalma says that he personally worked on the G-2 investigation of Fuentes Mohr, which concluded he was a communist. But Djalma says the decision to kill Fuentes Mohr was made at a higher level. According to two ranking officers who participated in the discussions, the plans to kill the two politicians were relayed by General David Can-

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cinos, who was then minister of defense and overseen by Colonel Héctor Montalvan, who was presidential chief of staff. Montalvan declined to comment on the charge. Montalvan's chief aide at the time was an officer named Edgar Godoy Gaitán. Earlier this year, the army appointed Colonel Godoy to be commander of the G-2.

BEATRIZ BARRIOS'S name has been in G-2 files for several years. A schoolteacher and a law student, she had been picked up by the army twice in the last five years. Both times she was freed after the intervention of a relative who is a high-ranking military officer. After the second abduction, she had gone to the Canadian Embassy, which was quietly running a refugee program that had spirited dozens out of the country. The Canadians moved quickly to book her on a flight to Toronto.

At the airport her reservation passed across the desk of a colonel in the G-2 section named Gilberto Barreda, who has an office in a modest cubicle off the passenger arrival corridor. Barrios was due to leave the country early on the morning of December 11. Hours before her scheduled departure, she phoned for a taxi from a friend's house. Either the cab was followed from the friend's house or the call was monitored over the G-2's intercept lines at the national phone company. Ten minutes into the ride, the taxi was pulled over. Barrios was dragged away by four heavily armed men.

The next morning a G-2 army captain named Armando Villegas was seen by a group of his colleagues by the side of a highway south of the capital standing over Barrios's naked and mutilated body. A note in Villegas's handwriting had been placed on the corpse, saying, "*Faltan Más*"—"More to come." After the killing, Captain Villegas was made a director of Cerezo's presidential guard. His superior at the time, General Jaime Hernández, has been chosen by the army as Cerezo's minister of defense.

One common assumption in Guatemala and the United States is that all the disappeared are dead. Clearly, most are. According to Amnesty International, "many thousands" have disappeared in recent years; the army admits to no political prisoners. But testimony of survivors and G-2 officials indicates that between capture and execution dozens and perhaps as many as a hundred *desaparecidos* can be found at any given time in the network of clandestine G-2 holding centers.

These centers range from ordinary-looking civilian homes to cordoned-off sectors of army bases. For example, a tree-shaded mansion at 5-15 Seventh Ave., Zone 9, in the capital was used in 1983 as a secret prison and interrogation center. As of early 1986, *desaparecidos* were being held at the headquarters of a security force called the Ambulant Military Police (PMA) outside the capital. The prisoners were held in cells hidden behind a concealed door in a building next to the soccer field. Another center, in operation at least until Cerezo's election, is located in the mountains of the Atlantic coast outside the town of Playa Grande, according to agents who have worked there as guards.

All legal efforts to learn the location of G-2 centers have been thwarted. Last September the mother of Fernando de la Roca Elias was able to record the license numbers of two cars used in her son's abduction. She went to the Guatemalan Supreme Court to force the government to release the identities of the vehicles' owners. In an unprecedented—and thus far unrepeated—decision the court ordered the government to comply. One car, plate P-75177, is registered to the Ministry of Defense; the other, plate P-253217, is assigned to the Cuartel General, the country's largest military base. Military sources also say that three peasant co-op members from the town of Patzún abducted by a G-2 unit last April 24 were still alive earlier this year and being held on the grounds of Cuartel General. In January the army appointed the commander of this base, General Héctor Alejandro Gramajo, as Cerezo's army chief of staff.

A few lucky enough to escape or be freed from the G-2 system have told their stories. Jim Boldenow, an American minister, was dragged from his car at gunpoint in 1982 and taken to a holding center where interrogators displayed a rack, electric cattle prods, and metal-tipped sticks they said were used for breaking bones. A friend of Boldenow informed the U.S. Embassy of the kidnapping, and embassy officials contacted then-chief of state General Efrain Rios Montt. He personally radioed the holding center and ordered Boldenow's release.

Last year a labor lawyer named Ramiro Ruiz Palma was tipped off by a friend that he was "on a list." He was able to have a contact within the government peruse his G-2 file. The G-2 had discovered that Ruiz Palma had advised a union at the Bank of Guatemala and made trips to Argentina and Mexico. They concluded that he was "a Marxist," and had marked him for elimination. He fled the country. Two weeks later, a union leader, Julio Celso, was snatched from a street corner and interrogated about Ruiz Palma's departure. Celso says he was taken to a house downtown, where he could hear prisoners screaming in other rooms. Celso was strapped to a blood-soaked mattress and threatened with a syringe. Only pressure on the army from friends in the U.S. labor movement secured Celso's release 24 hours later.

A personal connection to a senior officer or G-2 employee has become one of the more valued relationships among the middle and upper classes of Guatemala City. Only they can let relatives know the status of disappeared persons, how they are faring in clandestine detention, and when they are executed. For example, the mother of an agronomist named Jorge Rosal Paz, who disappeared in 1985, was consoled to receive from her G-2 contact at least a memento of her son: his identity card photo.

A FEW are still willing to speak out publicly against the system of political violence. "They [the military] have created a climate of terror," says Archbishop Próspero Penados, "a form of psychological torture, of constant uncertainty." Since becoming the country's leading bishop in 1984, Penados has boldly denounced the

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army for a number of specific killings. Nonetheless, Penados rations his public candor and keeps his distance from the GAM, the outspoken human rights group. "In Guatemala, one has to be very careful what one says," he explains. "One walks around with the knowledge that they can kill you at any time."

Nineth García, a housewife in Guatemala City, knows what Penados means. Her husband disàppeared in February 1984. Afterward a squad of machine-gun-toting soldiers from the government's special operations brigade invited themselves into her house. They laughingly told her that her husband was "just a little bruised" and would be released in a few days. When he failed to appear, she helped launch the GAM in June 1984. The last two people who attempted to establish human rights organizations in the country were both assassinated. Today García, her eight-year-old daughter, and her fellow GAM survivors are the targets of frequent death threats. She says she now regularly receives phone calls late at night in which a tape-recorded voice describes her upcoming funeral and starts to laugh.

THE GAM IS the only group left in the country that will publicly confront the army. Last year General Mejía denounced the GAM as "a pressure group managed and directed by the subversion, and one that is making problems for the peaceful Guatemalan population." A police spokesman added that the group "has reached such extremes that it cannot be tolerated anymore." Nine days later Héctor Gómez, a baker active in the GAM, was abducted as he left a meeting. His body appeared the next day with his tongue cut out. Five days later, another GAM leader named Rosario Godoy de Cuevas, who had given a passionate speech at Gómez's funeral, was snatched from a shopping center along with her brother and two-year-old son. Her raped and mutilated body was found in her car; the baby's fingernails had been torn out.

When we asked General Mejía about the incidents at a press conference last November, he denied that either case was a homicide. He said that the Godoys had perished "in a traffic accident." When asked how the baby had lost his fingernails in a car crash, Mejía replied that the existence of that injury—which was witnessed and photographed at the wake—was "disinformation."

President Cerezo told us that he attributes the killing of the GAM leaders to agents of the DIT. Cerezo says he is "convinced that the decision was made at the highest level of the government." Military officials involved in the operation confirm this view. They say that a team headed by Jaime Martínez Jiménez, then the chief of the DIT homicide division, carried out the killings. They say he was acting on the orders relayed by Colonel Carlos Dorantes Marroquín, who was then the G-2 commander. Dorantes refused to comment about the GAM killings. Martínez, these sources say, was supervised by army lieutenant colonel Juan Méndez. This February, when the DIT offices were raided, Jaime Martínez was nowhere to be found. He had been informed of the raid in advance and chose to stay home.

It is hard to say who would be more stunned by justice for the Guatemalan military: the victims or the army. The officers and oligarchs who run Guatemala are accustomed to eliminating reformist challengers and dismissing the shaken survivors with gestures of amused contempt. General Mejía has explained the country's chronic violence as "a folkloric problem that began with Cain and Abel. . . . The problem is that nobody is content with anybody."

In a statement as bold as any made under previous military regimes, the army recently acknowledged that the killings of recent years had indeed been official government policy. Defending the decree that gives amnesty to all officers, the army said the measure was needed "to avoid reprisals against government functionaries who, with the framework and jurisdiction . . . of their public functions, may have afterward become the object of controversy."

Guatemala's bureaucracy of death appears more comfortably entrenched than at any time since the mid-1960s. The abolition of the DIT, a group of expendable civilians, has won the armed forces international praise, while G-2's assassinations continue as before. A popular civilian president can now renegotiate the country's foreign debt and secure economic aid for the country's ailing agricultural exporters—impossible under the previous military regimes. And despite earlier statements that he would tolerate no repression on his watch, Cerezo has yet to denounce a single army killing. This May his interior minister said that political murders are no longer a problem.

CEREZO SURELY WOULD be far more willing to pursue prosecution of military officers if he did not feel that it threatened the survival of his government. If, for example, the Reagan administration publicly condemned the military's ongoing crimes, and supported efforts to hold the army officials accountable, the dream of ending the military's reign of terror would become a real, though distant, possibility. State Department officials claim that private diplomacy can work, leaving little prospect that the Reagan administration will go public. Yet still there is a feeling in Guatemala that unpredictable forces have been loosed and that the final disposition of the country's G-2 assassins is a story yet to unfold. At Cerezo's inauguration, angry crowds spat upon army trucks and shook their fists, crying, "*asesinos!*" In his first five months in office, Cerezo has received hundreds of letters—some from the friends and relatives of victims, some from government insiders—denouncing specific murders and abductions, and naming the officers responsible.

After hearing the pleas of GAM members a year ago, General Mejía replied: "You have stated that there are secret prisons—clandestine—and that your sons are alive. You have been given every means available [to locate them]. You can go wherever you like. Where are these clandestine prisons? Where are these family members? . . . I don't know where they are. When you find out, let me know."

The general may be getting an answer sooner than he expected. □

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A symposium.

WHAT SHOULD MICHAEL DO?

Two weeks ago we published the following letter from Michael C. Sloan of Bloomington, Indiana:

> I am a 22-year-old college graduate with a degree in English Lit from a "major, private university." I have noted with alarm your recent disparaging articles on both the law and investment banking professions. So I ask you, what should I do with my life? The Placement Center has been no help, and—sorry, Mr. Barnes—I don't look good in uniform. Your speedy reply would be appreciated.

Michael deserves an answer. We know nothing about him except what's in his letter. But if he's a typical graduate of a major private university, we assume he's reasonably smart, reasonably ambitious, reasonably idealistic, not excessively anything except perhaps over-schooled and undereducated. What should Michael do? Here is enough advice to make him sorry he asked.

You're probably not going to want to hear this, Michael. The fact that you read TNR suggests you're interested in journalism. Forget it. There are too many scribblers already, and journalism's bad for your mental hygiene. I have two ideas. If you're of a secular bent, why not put together a chain of honest, non-gouging auto repair shops? People like to go to places they can trust. That's why they like McDonald's: you can trust a Big Mac to taste the same every time and be reasonably priced. If word got around that a car repair place was honest, it would make a mint. As ridiculous as it sounds, honesty can pay. If you're more spiritually inclined, go to divinity school and become a minister. I'm not kidding. I might do this myself if I were in your shoes. The country is crawling with preachers who have a political agenda and modernist types who peddle a pinched, relativistic faith that inspires no one. What's needed are pastors (not just men, either) who haven't diluted their Christianity and don't have a political spiel. I know a few like this, and they are bright lights amid the darkness. And they truly help people.

FRED BARNES

That stretch of time from graduation day to day one of the first job of the rest of your life seems more precious in hindsight. Most people I know wish they had prolonged it. Almost everyone—those who followed it and, more likely, those who didn't—will provide the same excellent advice for the short term: don't be a lawyer, don't be an investment banker, and don't buy any heavy furniture. Go West or go East for a few months, or go even further in either direction for a year or so. Teach high school in a foreign country. Occasionally gaze out the window and ponder your real future, but keep these sessions to ten minutes per day during the first three months. There will still be some real jobs when you get back, and they may be better than the ones that were there just after graduation.

At some point you'll probably have to think about coming home. Take notes: examine the person.

JAMIE BAYLIS

Leave college.

1. Live at home and work for your hometown newspaper, or cut grass, or pump gas, but save money.

2. Travel on your savings. Concentrate on finding the city or town that pleases you most, especially the people in it.

3. Move to that city. Find a product or service in that place you can be enthusiastic about, whether it be a paper, a widget, a cause, a restaurant—whatever. Get a job representing that product—i.e., sales.

4. Take computer courses at night and pursue a hobby that you enjoy, such as flying, stamp collecting, or rare books.

5. Start a newsletter about your hobby using the computer to do all of the editing, layout, list mailing, etc. Sell it to other enthusiasts you encounter at fairs, through electronic bulletin boards, etc. If it takes off, do it full-time. Live happily ever after.

JEFFREY DEARTH

1. If you have to ask the price, you can't afford it, and if you have to ask what you should do, perhaps no advice is worth giving.

2. The possibilities in the letter appear to be limited to the professions. There is commerce—business—"trade." Liberal arts graduates are wanted in these, and often do well in them. Firms are looking for liberal arts graduates more and more, because they can handle more than one idea at the same time.

3. Behind the letter, I think, lurks a quite common attitude in the middle-class young now, that a career will be rewarding only if it is "literary" or "artistic," even in a marginal way. This is a trap. Not many are "literary" or "artistic" enough to do well.

4. Stop asking, and go out, look, and start doing. Almost any job away from academia will do. Twenty-two is young. You don't need to start now a career you'll follow for the rest of your life.

HENRY FAIRLIE

Did you read our editorial last week, "Teachers Go Pro"? Go spend a few years teaching or coaching or advising in a school somewhere. True, there are some big obstacles. Due to certification requirements, you'll have a hard time finding a public school that will take you. (New Jersey is one state that will.) But there are also good reasons to consider starting out as a teacher.

You know the many altruistic ones. There is also a half-selfish one that is often overlooked: time. A conscientious teacher's day is definitely as long as, or longer than, an average eight-hour workday. But thanks to summer vacations, you do have a quarter of a year to pursue other interests you may have and talents you may hope you have. Meanwhile your classmates in management intern programs, etc., never have a weekend, let alone a summer, to look up from their labors. Such an invitation to broad-mindedness is good for you, whatever you end up doing in life—and doing more than one thing isn't a bad idea at all. It's also good for our educational system, which can always use more energetic, curious teachers.

The salaries may not be great, but look at it this way. Investment bankers are addicted to their megabucks by age 25 and can't imagine trying some other line of work because it would mean a pay cut. In the freedom of your youthful penury, you can take whatever wild leap you want into another field and count on moving up. And who knows, thanks to the recent excellence-in-education drive, the pay scale for teach-

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If the press doesn't make a lot of people mad, it isn't doing its job.

If we don't irritate a good many in journalism, we aren't doing ours.

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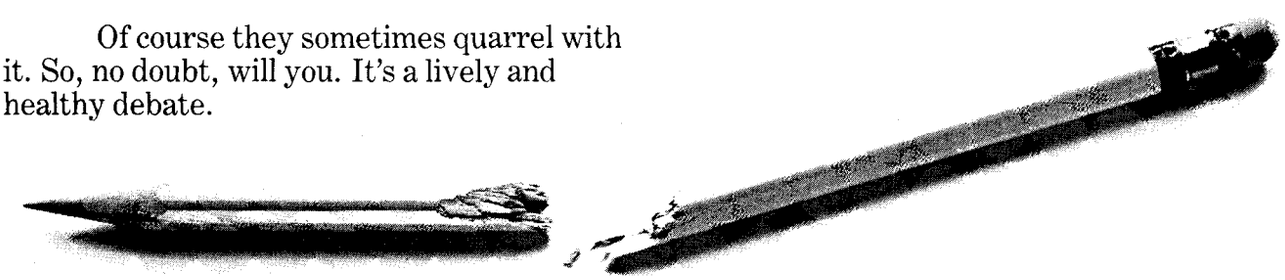
Of course they sometimes quarrel with it. So, no doubt, will you. It's a lively and healthy debate.

But all of us know that ours is much more than merely a gadfly function. We take pride, as well, in wholehearted salutes to many jobs well done...in candid discussion of the privileges our press enjoys...the threats that often confront it ...and the problems inherent in the power it sometimes wields.



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ers may even improve in time to do you some good.

ANN HULBERT

First, don't panic. There's no need to march into a credentialed profession just yet. If you kick around for a few years, and then decide you want to be a doctor, lawyer, or MBA—hey, at least you gave yourself a chance. Second: even if you find yourself in law school, remember: *that doesn't mean you have to become a lawyer!* Third: don't just chase after the profession that happens to be paying the biggest bucks at the moment (currently investment banking). Such market signals often turn out to be wrong, for one thing, so this year's hot ticket is next year's labor glut. And $100,000 is no compensation for a job you don't like (well, not enough compensation anyway).

Charles Peters, my own mentor, always tells people to "do what you love to do and do best." Good advice. But what if what you love to do is not what you do best? What if you don't know what you love to do? Well, freedom to try and fail really is the distinct virtue of American capitalism. We pay a price for it—lack of the full measure of welfare state security of more "progressive" democracies. You might as well take advantage of it. The best way to do this is in some sort of entrepreneurial venture where you can create jobs, fill a need, and make a killing, too. But that takes special glands. Even as an employee, though, you can serve your country. What America needs now are smart people to rebuild our industry so we don't cede that whole economic sector to the Japanese and Southeast Asians.

We may not have souls, but it's useful when making job decisions to pretend that we do. And a job that costs you yours, be it lobbying or polluting or cheating, isn't worth it, even if there's nobody keeping score but you. Most of my friends who have sold out are now either trapped or so filled with concealed self-loathing that their lives are permanently distorted. Or so I like to imagine.

That's one advantage to being your own boss—you have the freedom *not* to do things, which employees don't have. But even employees usually have more leverage than they think, if they're careful to preserve their ability to walk out. Hence my final advice: if you really don't like it, it's O.K. to quit. Got me where I am today.

P.S. Mom, send another check.

MICKEY KAUS

Believe it or not, Michael, you should go into investment banking after all. Here's why. If you're like most talented people, you're torn between doing good and making good, the hunger for excitement and the hunger for security, the desire to go for it and the fear of failure. I'm not about to tell you that the latter emotions are ignoble. They aren't. Your problem is that, for rational economic reasons, the most morally and intellectually satisfying careers don't pay as well, except in "psychic income." Furthermore, many of the most exciting options are also the riskiest. If you knew for sure that you were a great poet, you wouldn't mind living like a poet. But who can be sure? Better a mediocre lawyer than a mediocre poet.

Many people think they aren't greedy, only to discover too late that they are. Or they take the big gamble, fail, and sulk. Washington is full of lobbyists and cynics and cynical lobbyists who used to be idealistic. New York has plenty of embittered middle-aged poets and actors.

The absurd incomes being "earned" [sic] by young investment bankers offer a chance to escape from this dilemma by reversing the usual pattern. Get your greed trip out of the way early. Then quit after a few years and spend the rest of your life doing good or having fun. Nothing bolsters idealism (or so I would imagine) like the knowledge that nothing you say or do will have any drastic effect on your own life-style. Or you can be a painter after all, and it doesn't matter if you're a lousy one. (In fact, if you've done really well early on, you'll be treated like a good painter whether you are one or not.)

The peril of this course is obvious: Will you really quit when you've socked away enough to guarantee a comfortable middle-class existence? Or will "enough" be an ever-receding concept, just beyond the next couple of deals? We have confidence in you, Michael. Don't let us down.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

Even though my field is politics, I think the area where you can advance society's interests is scientific and medical research. You don't have to believe that technology is a panacea to realize that scientific advances have dramatically improved the quality of life in America over the past few decades. A good second option is to use any entrepreneurial talent you have to figure out how to distribute the benefits of research equitably. But if you don't have a scientific or business-oriented bone in your body, then journalism is an honorable profession.

MORTON KONDRACKE

Try medicine. Even though you're a literature major, you can fulfill the prerequisites for med school in only one year. If you're moderately idealistic, practice psychiatry with sick people, say, in a state mental hospital. If you're extremely idealistic, join Doctors Without Frontiers or be a medic in the guerrilla war of your choice (Angola, El Salvador, Nicaragua: pick one). And even if you spend your days straightening noses in Scarsdale, you'll still be doing good.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Michael, investigative reporting—much out of style yet much needed—is your ticket. No experience is necessary. The pay isn't great, fame is unlikely, and the field is wide open, especially in Washington. Many mainstream journalists, in their eagerness to subscribe to the conventional wisdom that investigative reporting is dead, refuse to look into all sorts of interesting misdeeds. Other investigative reporters get bogged down in petty scandals about whether Senator Smith reported his two pet rabbits on his 1979 financial disclosure forms. Interesting investigative stories that explain how our government and economy actually work—about right-wing pork barrels, big-city political machines, new methods of political financing, and banks in trouble—just aren't being done. It takes only a reasonably intelligent, curious, and persistent person to begin to figure out what's going on and to tell the world about it. You're the guy.

JEFFERSON MORLEY

"Love and work," said Freud, are what make the good life. But the idea that we must love our work is a post-Freudian

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expectation. Unfortunately it's not enough to love your work: other people must love you for it. This is one reason why you are so mystified about what you should do with yourself. If you take the idealistic path, the cynics will say that you are from another era—an era which, in its deluded hopes, exacerbated our problems. If you go the way of the fleshpots, which on some readings is anything but the Peace Corps, there will always be someone with moral authority who will point the accusing finger and stigmatize: "yuppie." "If I am only for myself," as Rabbi Hillel once put it, "what am I?" But since there are always two positions, "If I am not for myself, who will be?"

There is a middle way: the life of art. Less and less is this the solitary life. The number of consumers for its products increases so fast that the uncertainty of success is, at the present moment, not greater in the arts than in other fields. And even in the one art, poetry, that has no body of consumers, its practitioners don't starve, as they used to. They teach. And get foundation grants, just like other writers and painters, sculptors, musicians, and filmmakers do. Still, to choose to be an artist is not to be moved by the pecuniary aspirations of the investment banker—though there are some who succeed beyond the wildest dreams of an investment banker. There is, of course, the objection that one doesn't choose to be an artist. One is or one isn't. One won't find this out, however, until the market for bad art declines, like the market for bad widgets. Unless the market for bad art won't decline, which is a distinct possibility.

MARTIN PERETZ

Look into yourself. Focus on your values, on what brings you satisfaction and gives you meaning. If you find nothing, consider plastics.

ROBERT B. REICH

Michael, your "degree in English Lit from a 'major, private university' " should have warned you off writing to a magazine for vocational advice, unless it be *Cosmopolitan.*

In our society there are other places to hear oracular voices. There are ladies in bandannas and dirndl skirts behind the dusty windows of run-down storefronts who are reputed to be good at this kind of work. Astrology has much to be said on its behalf. And those who attend Quaker meetings have on occasion heard the mighty voice from within speaking words of penetrating insight. Be warned, however, against guidance counselors or giving your money to the members of any profession whose name begins with a psy or a soc. Above all, if, in the future, you never again seek the advice of a collection of hacks and hackettes grown wizened staring at their computer terminals, you will die old, rich, respected by your neighbors, and the great-grandfather of many children.

NICHOLAS VON HOFFMAN

Forget everyone's dreary advice about career paths and corporate ladders. Why not experiment for the next few years? Liberal arts graduates have learned a little about thinking and writing and arguing, but don't know much about life outside school walls. Here's one approach.

Start off in California, with a low-level job in Silicon Valley, where you can pick up the essentials of the computer revolution. After you've had enough, head for Detroit and work in the auto industry for a while. If jobs are scarce, think about doing some volunteer work—say, at one of the churches that runs a shelter for the homeless. When you run out of savings, there's always the Sunbelt or rural America. You could try working on an oil rig or as a coal miner; as a farm hand or a cook in a roadside diner. Then move on to New York (perhaps as an assistant in an advertising agency or a publishing firm) or to Washington (as an aide on Capitol Hill).

By now you'll be three to five years out of school. You'll know how to program a computer, join a cause, brand a bull, make a good milk shake, and survive office politics. If you're still undecided about a career, you can always start up an employment agency for college graduates who don't know what to do with themselves. You'll make a killing.

DOROTHY WICKENDEN

Having been disabused of a career in law and a career in investment banking, Michael, you wonder whether there is a career in anything else. Your question is more confirmation of how much the militant materialism of present-day America has intimidated the imagination of its young people. After all, law and banking were *all* we ruled out. Of course money, power, and influence are certainly some things you could do with your life. And with these things, of course, you could also do good works. (Though "idealism" has a way of not surviving business school.) If you believe that your talents lie that way, I'd say go that way, directly. But first examine your talents carefully, to discover whether there are more primary contributions that you can make and more primary rewards that you can reap. Can you write? Can you dance? Can you see the end of a laboratory experiment in its beginning? Can you find things in paintings or poems that others cannot? Can you serve a parish? If you can do any of these things, it would be a shame to chase paper instead. (If these things disappoint you or if you disappoint them, you can chase paper later.) Such a self-examination, however, takes time. Above all, it takes experience. Since you don't feel a calling, I suggest that you exploit your state of suspension and head out toward the world. In an earlier era I might have recommended the Peace Corps. (Not least because "idealism" had a way of not surviving it, too.) These days I'd recommend a hardworking, wakeful sojourn in a foreign land. There you will be taught by strangeness about yourself and about things outside yourself. A more intelligent decision about your life is sure to result. I understand that this is demanding a late start, and a good deal of socioeconomic courage. But it is sad to watch people rush to surrender the fearlessness of their youth to the achievements and anxieties of a precocious middle age. "The institutions" aren't going away.

LEON WIESELTIER

What about graduate school? People have been frightened away from the life of the mind for almost two decades now by the legendary impossibility of finding a job as a university professor. But by the early 1990s—when you'll be getting your doctorate—universities will have more tenured positions open than at any time since the early 1960s, so there's a pretty good chance that you can actually get tenure somewhere. Since you live in Bloomington, I take it that you don't have a fear of the Midwest (as many East Coast snobs do), so even if you do wind up in "America's heartland," you won't be too unhappy.

JONATHAN ZASLOFF

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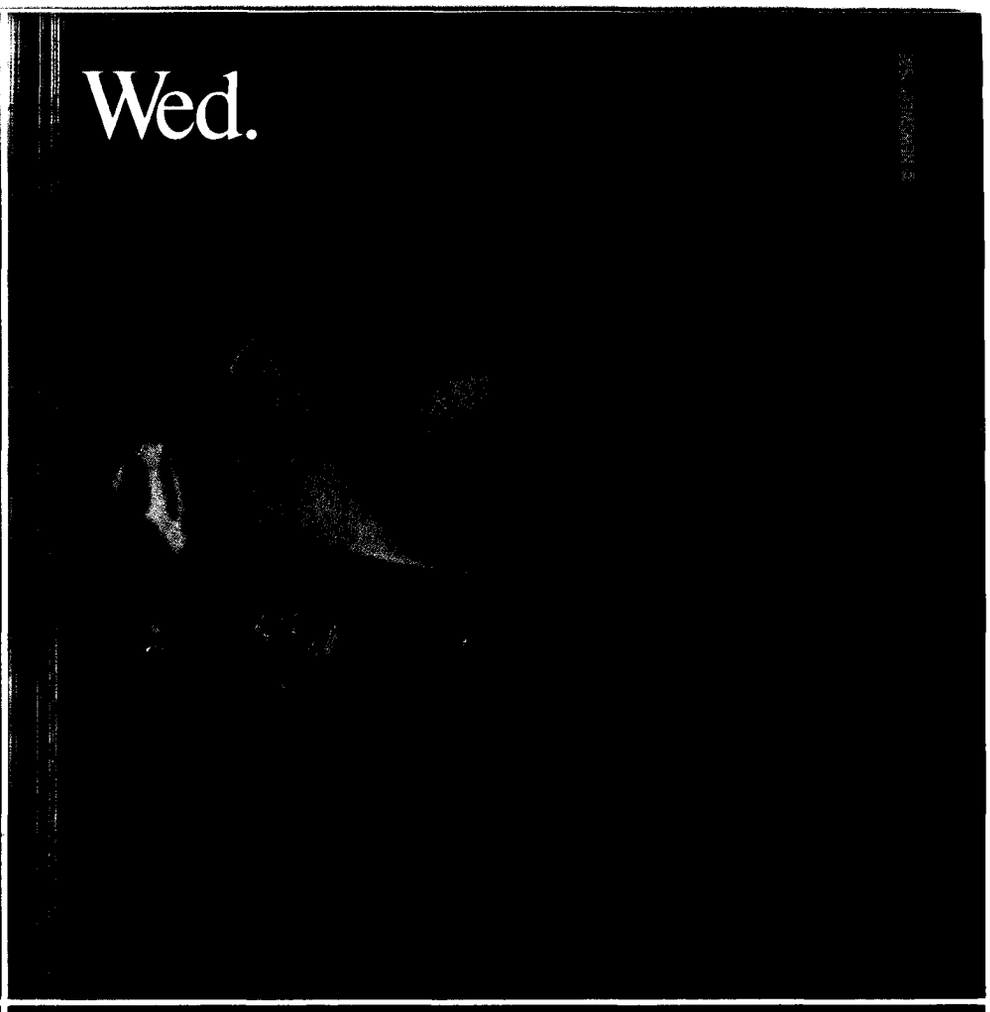
Wed.



Sat.

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STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

A 'New' Renoir; And More

Jean Renoir's *Elena and Her Men*, made in 1956, has not been shown theatrically in the U.S. since 1957, when it was released here, dubbed into English, under the title *Paris Does Strange Things*. Now the Film Program at the Public Theater in New York brings us the original version, subtitled. I assume there is also some dubbing in this French version because the leading man is the American Mel Ferrer. Ingrid Bergman, the leading woman, plays a princess who was made Polish, I assume, to explain her accent in French. (She too may have been dubbed. At any rate, Renoir is said to have thought her French "scarcely adequate," especially since she went home every evening and spoke Italian with her then-husband, Roberto Rossellini.)

Elena and Her Men
(Nicolas Jouve Interama)

Signal 7
(Francis Ford Coppola)

I had never seen the film in any version and hurried to what I expected to be a disappointment: which it proved to be. This flip remark—about a man who made masterpieces and had immense influence on other directors—is justified as much by the writings about the film as by the film itself. Renoir calls *Elena* a "musical fantasy" and treats it as a divertissement with some knives hidden among the flowers. I don't think the knives are very sharp or the flowers very beguiling, but nowhere does he imply the aspirations that have been attributed to *Elena* by others. Godard: " 'The' French film *par excellence* . . . because it is the most intelligent of films. Art and theory of art, at one and the same time; beauty and the secret of beauty. . . . " Truffaut: "Renoir in his greatest period." Concede that these two young *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics were then promoting the "personal" approach to filmmaking that Renoir certainly embodied. Still, those comments were part of an impassioned rhetoric that became exemplary for critical mimics at home and abroad and that helped to establish the auteur view of (among others) Renoir. This view takes the director's style as the career's principal achievement. It tends to blur distinctions among individual works, or even more idiosyncratically, it exalts dubious works in the career as if to controvert non-auteur critics who prefer the Renoir films in which his style is employed to more fulfilling purpose. So *Elena*, as I feared, did not live up to its advance billing.

It is set in Paris at the turn of the century, but it centers on a woman's intrigues to promote a military dictator clearly based on General Boulanger, whose rightist plottings had collapsed over a decade earlier. Now to make a flirtatious musical comedy on that subject at any time would have risked trivialization of grave matters. (Boulanger committed suicide.) To make such a musical only 11 years after the end of World War II verges on the callously recuperative. "History in . . . *Elena* . . . becomes subordinated to the demands of art," wrote Leo Braudy. The same might be said about the musical show *Springtime for Hitler* contained within Mel Brooks's *The Producers*.

Bergman, a widow, agrees to marry an elderly rich businessman because she needs money. In a crowd honoring a popular general on July 14th, she meets a wealthy young idler, Ferrer. He introduces her to his friend the general, Jean Marais, who is smitten with Bergman at first sight even though he has a devoted mistress. Then the general's advisers ask Bergman to use her wiles on him, to persuade him to seize power—especially since a war threat with Germany has flared over an accident with an observer balloon. (This, from the maker of *La Grande Illusion*, could be tolerable only if it were funny.) Bergman's rich fiancé agrees to the scheme out of patriotism. The final sorting-out takes place in a small-town brothel, which is used, not like the brothel in Genet's *The Balcony*—a symbolic place where prostitution and power intermingle—but for conventional male fantasy, a haven where all the girls are gorgeous and everyone is jolly. The last offense is to show us that French men and women, including the crowd surrounding the brothel, are more interested in lovemaking than in politics. Bergman ends up with Ferrer, the general goes off with his mistress, and France is saved from dictatorship by *l'amour*.

Elena needn't have been "the most intelligent of films." It could indeed have had exactly the same risky script if it had been in the hands of a René Clair or Ernst Lubitsch. But Renoir plods. Apparently, in order to have a light touch, he needed a serious subject, as in that great film *The Rules of the Game*. He deliberately reminds us here of that prewar film: part of *Elena* is set in a chateau, has love chases with servants and even a fat female guest. The reminder was a further mistake.

No director of Renoir's talents could make a film without showing them. His style is visible in *Elena* and mostly consists, as usual, of attempts to meld the-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

My Beautiful Laundrette. Tender, funny, humane, though discursive story of Pakistanis in London today. Exceptionally well acted and directed. (Reviewed 4/7/86)

Tea in the Harem. Another exceptionally well acted and directed story of aliens in a big city—North Africans in Paris. More concerned with fact than insight, thus lesser than *Laundrette*; but the writer-director, Mehdi Charef, is a find. (6/16/86)

Turtle Diary. Glenda Jackson, Ben Kingsley, and Michael Gambon play like chamber musicians in this Harold Pinter script of Russell Hoban's novel. Wry, intelligent treatment of an unlikely small adventure. (3/10/86)

Vagabond. Sandrine Bonnaire's tacit, intense performance of a teenage wanderer in southern France is the core of Agnès Varda's fine work. The mystery of the girl's life and death remains hers, rightly, at the finish. (6/2/86)

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ater and film. In the first scene, for instance, he "deepens" the screen by pivoting from a two-shot of Bergman and a friend at a piano, seemingly alone, to show us two people playing cards beyond them in an alcove—the way a theater director might suddenly turn on the lights upstage. When Bergman's carriage is trapped in the July 14th crowd, we first get the size of the crowd only by the people visible through the window—another theater effect. But every sequence that is supposed to be feathery and tickling—like the later misplacing of a child in that crowd scene—sorely lacks the touch that Clair could have given it.

Even if all else were better than it is, *Elena* would still sag because of its two leading actors. Renoir made the film, he said, because of Bergman: "I wanted to see her laugh and smile on the screen. . . ." She looks beautiful, and she does laugh and smile a lot, but none of this makes her a competent comedienne. (It's a Danielle Darrieux role.) As for Ferrer, the idea of associating charm and elegance with him gave me the only laugh in his performance. (It was a part for Gérard Philipe.) Renoir's casting of Bergman and Ferrer—presumably with at least one eye on the international box office—sank the ship before it was launched.

At the furthest end of the spectrum in tone and intent is a new American film called *Signal 7*. The title is the distress signal a taxi driver uses on his radio; the picture is about San Francisco cabbies. Rob Nilsson, who directed two previous features that I haven't seen, assembled about a dozen actors whom he knew, gave them a story line, and asked them to improvise. Not that there's much story. Most of the film, which is largely shot in close-up, consists of anecdotes and conversation among the cabbies, in the garage or sitting around a poker table there. Virtually all the scenes elsewhere involve a driver played by Bill Ackridge. This driver has ambitions as an actor, and he auditions for a part in a production of *Waiting for Lefty* (which is about taxi drivers); he has a long and troubled scene with an Israeli woman passenger (Hagit Farber); when he gets home that night, he practices for the *Lefty* role in the bathroom, feels disconsolate, and climbs into bed next to his comforting wife.

For the first 20 minutes or so, the film is like watching improvisation exercises in an advanced acting class, done by men with much experience in that kind of class, in a "contained" class situation. Then an odd metamorphosis occurs: a union of these actors' classroom expertise with their keen observations of men like the ones they are portraying transforms the film into a whole, purposeful work. Of course what we see is the result of editing and pruning, but the feeling persists that an Actors Studio field day has been heightened into a completed naturalistic film. *Signal 7* thus becomes a small triumph of a specifically American kind of acting—heavy reliance on the ability to remember and re-create veristic detail, as promulgated originally by the Studio in New York (therefore a dilution of Stanislavsky). We are constantly told that this kind of acting is now passé, and certainly there is not much possibility of aesthetic adventure left in it; but it still predominates in our theater and film, and *Signal 7* shows it being forged from the workshop up.

This feeling of inner exploration, of self-and-character, is certified when one of the cabbies, Dan Leegant, repeats to one driver a story that he had told to another at the beginning. The first time it was a wild sexual adventure that ended with the teller's smirk; at the end the same adventure, recounted by the same man, ends quite differently. The fact that Leegant could see the same story quite differently, as he improvised a second time, is a subtle proof of imaginative probing.

Signal 7 is modest in every way, but its modesty may obscure the fact that Nilsson and friends have unusual abilities. This is hardly the first improvisational film; John Cassavetes, to whom this picture is dedicated, is only one predecessor. But Nilsson's group has worked with very, very little action; most of it is interior exploration. The actors have used their own humanity to find and fix the humanity of the characters.

The corrupting influence of Vincent Canby and the *New York Times*.

A Critic In The Dark

By Raymond Carney

You have to fight sophistication.
—John Cassavetes

ONE OF THE dozen or so most powerful and influential men in the world of film has never produced, written, directed, or acted in a movie. He doesn't even live on the West Coast. Vincent Canby, the 61-year-old first-string film critic for the *New York Times* for the past 16 years, lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and has no official connection with the glitzy world of the studios. But he has the ability to make or break the fortunes of scores of films every year.

Confronted with such a description of his critical clout, Canby vehemently denies it. First, he argues that certain films are almost guaranteed to find bookings and make money no matter what is said about them; the association of a particular star or director with a project (say, Barbra Streisand, Clint Eastwood, or Steven Spielberg) or the presence of certain trendy themes, combined with the commitment of a major studio to a saturation advertising campaign, can make a specific movie practically critic-proof. Still, these guaranteed blockbusters are few and far between (as investors learn to their sorrow). Indeed, as the exceptions, they only prove the rule of Canby's power in the vast majority of other instances.

Second, Canby insists that his power is not really personal at all. As he

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told one interviewer: "It is only the power of the *Times*, because the *Times* critic doesn't really exist outside of the *Times*." It's true that Canby's influence is not something he achieved on his own; the infamous Bowsley Crowther, Canby's predecessor, who wrote regularly for "the newspaper of record" and reigned in undisputed glory from 1940 to 1968, had the same power as Canby does today. But it is a distinction without a difference. However accrued, and however personally unearned, Canby's power is power nevertheless—and it is as great as the power of some of the biggest stars and producers in the business.

THE distinctive power of the *Times* reviewer results from a virtually unique confluence of geographical, demographic, and bureaucratic factors peculiar to the relationship of the *Times* and the film distribution system in this country. New York City—not Washington, Boston, or Los Angeles—is the initial port of entry for virtually every important, unconventional, or independently financed American or foreign film. How such a film performs in the first few days or weeks of its initial run in New York commonly determines not only the size of the advertising budget that will be committed to it and the number of bookings it will subsequently receive, but in many cases whether it will ever receive any general distribution at all. If a film that wasn't produced as a guaranteed blockbuster (that is to say, a film that stands a chance of being interesting or innovative) fails to pack them in during its initial run in New York, there is a real likelihood that it will simply be pulled from distribution and written off as a tax loss by its backers. Thus the New York reviewer, who writes about films released in and around the city and is read by residents of the city and its immediately outlying areas, has an inordinate influence within the film distribution system itself.

By this logic a reviewer at the *New York Post* or *Daily News* would have clout equal to Canby's, but the special distribution and readership of the *Times* make it uniquely powerful when it comes to determining the destiny of certain kinds of films. Its circulation is relatively small, as things are reckoned in this era of mega-reader and -viewership (approximately one million in the daily edition and a million and a half in the Sunday—though one should multiply the Sunday circulation by at least two for the probable readership for any given issue). But, as the ad agencies say, it is not the numbers that count, but the demographics. The *Times* has a near-monopoly on the attention of a certain kind of upscale reader. From Princeton to New Haven, yuppie couples, middle-aged professionals and businessmen, and tweedy Ivy League alums of all stripes define the typical Canby reader. And this is exactly the audience—one with the financial wherewithal, the leisure time, and the artistic curiosity and presumed independence of aesthetic judgment—that determines the fate of the non-blockbuster or innovative film. It is this audience that Canby either delivers or doesn't.

Indeed, it might be argued that three recent changes have made Canby's power even greater than Crowther's, or any previous *Times* critic's. First, there has been the decline of the studios as committed promoters of their own work; even B-pictures were once part of a larger package of films assured of being given some minimal level of promotion and support no matter how they fared in their initial weeks. Second, the cable television market has expanded (which encourages producers of small-budget or independent films to maximize their short-term gains and minimize their projected long-term losses by pulling a film from theatrical distribution and dumping it on the cable market if it gets into critical or commercial trouble). Finally, the psychology of the individual ticket purchaser has changed; where film-goers in the 1940s and 1950s simply went out "to see a picture" (often any picture) on Saturday nights, the critically informed, college-educated viewer in this era of higher ticket prices and less accessible theaters increasingly looks to specific critics for advice on whether or not to go to a particular film. All of which is why it is no exaggeration to say that the fate of the non-blockbuster, non-critic-proof movie—the small, independent, innovative, unusual film—hangs in the balance every time Canby chooses to write about it, or not to.

I DON'T MEAN to slight the reviewing of his junior colleagues who also write on film for the *Times*. But it is undeniable that Canby is officially their supervisor (under the general editorship of Walter Goodman), and that he sets the tone and style for much of their work. Nor is it my intention to make the job of a regular film reviewer sound easier than it is. The effect of sitting through hundreds of absolutely dreadful films a year must be one of the most mind-numbing and spirit-killing imaginable. The percentages are relentlessly against the critic with high standards: 19 out of 20 films are guaranteed to be an almost complete waste of time. Thus the temptation to become cynical about the whole process, to lower one's standards in order to salvage a bit of self-respect by finding redeeming qualities in whatever piece of drivel one is forced to watch, is almost overwhelming. But it is precisely the rarity of a work of true intelligence and beauty that makes it all the more important that a critic not become cynically relativistic. He must, instead, hold fast to his values in order to be able to distinguish the rare good film when it does come along.

That is what Canby has failed to do. He sold out his critical standards long ago in order to avoid the hard words and stern judgments that otherwise would be required of him over and over again. Instead, nothing is taken very seriously or objected to very strenuously. The result is a critical abrogation of values. Canby represents the clubman as critic.

CANBY'S critical beliefs and practices are inseparable from the general tone he takes in his reviewing. It is almost invariably light and disarmingly facetious. The effect, at first, is one of extreme geniality; nothing seems to ruffle or upset Canby. But what seems pleasantly facetious when applied to the latest installment of *Rocky* or *Star Wars* eventually becomes annoying when applied to almost everything. Of course, most Hollywood film is indeed junk food for the senses, and deserves no better or more serious treatment. Still, Canby doesn't quite take *any* of the serious films he views seriously enough to become passionate or earnest about them.

Everything is a bit of a goof, an occasion for urbanity, an experience of irony. It seems no accident that the films he most likes tend to be blandly genial in the way his writing usually is. To call a film "funny," lightly "entertaining," or above all, "not to take itself too seriously" is, for Canby, one of the supreme forms of praise. To treat a work of art in a cute, tongue-in-cheek way is a rhetorically expedient method for any critic who would spare himself the effort of difficult critical discriminations, and the potential dangers of a personal commitment to a serious judgment.

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Canby's techniques of intellectual hedging or equivocation are many. He is, first, a master of the lightly ironic use of the negative understatement to suggest more than he is ever willing to commit himself to in a positive way. This is what in classical rhetoric is called the use of "litotes"—saying what something is not rather than what it is. At least as long ago as Mark Antony's funeral oration for Julius Caesar, rhetoricians have known that ironic negatives are always politically safer and argumentatively easier than a clear commitment to anything positive. Canby's favorite and most maddening way of deploying negative understatements is in pairs, in a strategy of the excluded middle. Consider this: "Though it's far from being an exercise in avant-garde techniques, *Smithereens* is not especially conventional." Or this: "[The writer and the director of *Alligator*] do not transform the formula film into some higher art form, but neither do they rip it off." Or this, about one of the James Bond films: "*For Your Eyes Only* is not the best of the series by a long shot . . . but it's far from the worst." You get the idea. Canby gets full credit for critical judiciousness, and for a sense of historical or generic context, even as he archly and ironically avoids the bother of having to stake his judgment on anything particular at all. On occasion the pairing can even be between two positives, as when we are told that Ed Pincus's *Diaries* "inevitably reveals a lot more and a lot less than meets the eye," and the film itself disappears completely.

BUT FOR Canby these are relatively blatant equivocations. He is usually much more adept at fence-sitting. One of his subtler techniques involves modifying a potentially positive statement with a potentially negative one, with no indication of the discrepancy between the terms. One might call it praising with faint damns, as when he describes *The Godfather* as "a superb Hollywood movie," or characterizes *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in the following terms:

> If Hollywood insists on making films designed to gross hundreds of millions of dollars by appealing to the largest possible audiences, it could not do much better than this imaginative, breathless, very funny homage to the glorious days of B-pictures. . . .

It is crucial to take in the double-edged quality of these modifiers, which, in case we don't get the point, is explained in the final sentence of *The Godfather* review, when Canby sums up the film as "one of the most brutal and moving [signs of shilly-shallying already creep in with this doublet] chronicles of American life ever designed [and watch this final twist] within the limits of popular entertainment." Canby wants credit for asserting something that he is not only unable or unwilling to defend, but that, when challenged, he reserves the right to unsay.

HIS USE OF deliberately wacky metaphors is another way in which he coyly and self-protectively distances himself from his own comments, as when in his review of Syberberg's *Our Hitler* he compares the director to a character in *Animal House*:

> Like the dopey student in *National Lampoon's Animal House*, who, as he smokes marijuana for the first time, is suddenly aware of the universes contained within the atoms of his own little finger, Mr. Syberberg is not one who quickly dismisses his own insights, whether good, bad, indifferent or secondhand.

This is like comparing *Götterdämmerung* to *Fantasia*. It is a snide attempt at trivialization by association, which at the same time cutely reserves the right to unsay itself (Don't you get it? It's only a joke. Where's your sense of humor?) as soon as it is questioned. It is a rhetorical technique that Pauline Kael invented and introduced into the mainstream of highbrow film criticism, but even she never carries it to the heights of stupidity that one finds in Canby.

Canby self-protectively writes and unwrites himself like this in review after review, simultaneously praising and patronizing a film, patting it on the head and kicking it in the rump, demonstrating at the same time his love of trashy "movies" and his reverence for "cinema." As he puts it in a further rumination on Spielberg and *Raiders*: "Is it possible that Spielberg . . . will ever make a film on the order, say, of François Truffaut's *Stolen Kisses*? Probably not, but then Mr. Truffaut probably never will make a film like *Raiders*." As in this last statement, delivered in the best pseudo-patrician manner, his love for Hollywood is proclaimed as a kind of deliberate slumming, just as his love for Art (typically signified by Truffaut—the petit bourgeois as artist) recognizes that it is, alas, never really as much "fun" as junk is. He demonstrates his superiority to the experience he writes about, even

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as he shows that that superiority doesn't in the least prevent him from being one of the guys and liking it anyway.

CANBY IS never wounded by a film, never angered, never elated, never transported. Within the rhetorical and psychological world of his criticism, such eruptions of emotion, such deep intimacies of response, would be bad form. That would be taking films too seriously, a terrible admission that films matter. For Canby, however, films cozily exist more or less in their own hermetic network of relationships with other films. That is the most disturbing implication of an expression like "a superb Hollywood movie" or the comparisons of one filmmaker or film with another in every one of the preceding quotations. Canby isn't evaluating original expressions; he is grading imitations of imitations, evaluating copies of copies. That is why his reviews become, more than half the time, exercises in triangulating the positions of films vis-à-vis each other.

Of course, such contextualizations have their value. But at their best they can be no more than a prelude toward an appreciation of life and experience outside the movies. That is the movement that never occurs in Canby's prose (except in a special sense I will discuss). Taking his cue from the fatuousness of writers and critics who give us novels that are about novel-writing and poems that are about poetry, Canby's movies usually are about, or refer us to, other movies, which is why the discussion of one film so quickly and easily segues into the discussion of another and then another. This slipperiness is one of the most characteristic aspects of Canby's critical performance. But it is less a process of free association than the consequence of a coherent theory of how films mean. Meaning is always relative—as in the following description of *Caddyshack*, which reads like a parody of Canby's critical approach to even the most serious films. It would take an Einstein to sort out the truth among all of this relativity: "It's not as funny as *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie*, but it is less pushy than *Meatballs*. It is not as thickly stocked with outrageous moments as *Animal House*, yet it is far easier to take than *Where the Buffalo Roam*."

But Canby's critical relativism isn't limited to dazzling us with his command of cinematic references. One of the greatest compliments he feels he can give a film is to allude to its relationship with a work of literature. It is hardly surprising that someone who is implicitly so contemptuous and patronizing of the experience of film-going should feel that the supreme honor he can pay it is to dignify it with a literary pedigree or allusion. While Canby's breezy comparisons of one trashy film with another may be amusing, his aspiration toward Arnoldian High Seriousness, when he pays literary homage to a "classy" film, is positively embarrassing.

HIS RECENT treatment of Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters* was typical. Canby worships Allen. Given his slumming attitude toward film-going, one is not at all surprised to see him trooping into service every literary allusion or piece of lit-crit jargon that comes to hand in his attempt to dignify his favorite. Thus the film has, we are not amazed to discover, "the narrative scope of a novel." The title character is compared to Galatea and the setting to the forest of Arden. The film's comic structure is said to be "of almost classic shapeliness." And the sequence of arbitrary happy endings that are tacked on to the end of the movie is significantly transformed in his review into "the series of reconciliation scenes that conclude the film."

Note that these comparisons are not part of any real analysis of the "novelistic" qualities of the movie. As anyone who has seen the film knows, such an analysis would be impossible to support for this film anyway. They are just empty phrases in the air, incense burned before the shrine to Woody. And Canby offers more in another review of the same film, invoking not one but two of his favorite laudatory adjectives, "literate" and "literary," in the same sentence. "Mr. Allen," Canby announces from the mountaintop, "has become not only America's most literate filmmaker, but also our most literary one." What exactly this means, and why it should be a compliment and not an insult to a filmmaker, is not entirely clear.

This toniness may be called Canby's Grand Allusion Style (or GAS, for short). The place to encounter it at its glibbest, fuzziest, and most self-indulgent is not in Canby's daily reviews (from which I have been principally quoting up to now), but in his "think pieces," called "Film View," in the *Times*'s Sunday edition. His editors have apparently been delighted with these pieces, since nothing has more notably characterized Canby's tenure at the *Times* than their gradual expansion and institutionalization. They are the Arts and Leisure section's equivalent of the geopolitical ruminations of James Reston or Flora Lewis on the Op-Ed page.

IN THE specific instance of *Hannah and Her Sisters*, Canby followed his Friday review of the film with a Sunday "Film View" column devoted exclusively to it, a form of homage in itself. Here Canby went much further than "literate" and "literary," segueing all the way from Woody Allen to Peter Handke, and from there to "all fiction":

> If *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan* might be called novellas, then *Hannah and Her Sisters* looks to be Mr. Allen's first completely successful, full-length novel. . . .
>
> Some years ago critics liked to point out that Peter Handke, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras and other authors of the so-called nouveau roman were children of the cinema. They borrowed jump cuts, wrote in the present tense (as if reporting a movie's plot) and described the surface of things as neutrally as a camera recording people and objects in its view. . . .
>
> Mr. Allen doesn't make "nouveau films" (among other things his films are usually too comic to be chilly in the manner of the nouveau roman), but most of his narratives, starting with *Take the Money and Run*, employ the kind of cinematic freedom—freedom to jump around in time and place and point of view—that originally inspired the authors of the nouveau romans. Curiously enough, it's this freedom that now makes *Hannah and Her Sisters* seem quite as literary as it is cinematic. All of Mr. Allen's films are stuffed with literary references, but *Hannah and Her Sisters* demonstrates literary techniques and devices as often as it drops names.
>
> *Hannah and Her Sisters* . . . somehow manages to keep eight people in focus simultaneously. Though the story appears to proceed chronologically, there are also extended flashbacks as well as ellipses that hurl the narrative forward while sustaining the essential mystery (who did what to whom and why?) that is the basis of all fiction, not only the whodunit.

I quote the central passages in Canby's argument (using the term loosely) at such length to show that the briefer quotations above are not unfairly excerpted from a context that might explain them. The longer the passage, in fact, the more muddled is what passes for reasoning in Canby's prose. There is so much fuzzy thinking here that it is difficult to know where to begin point-

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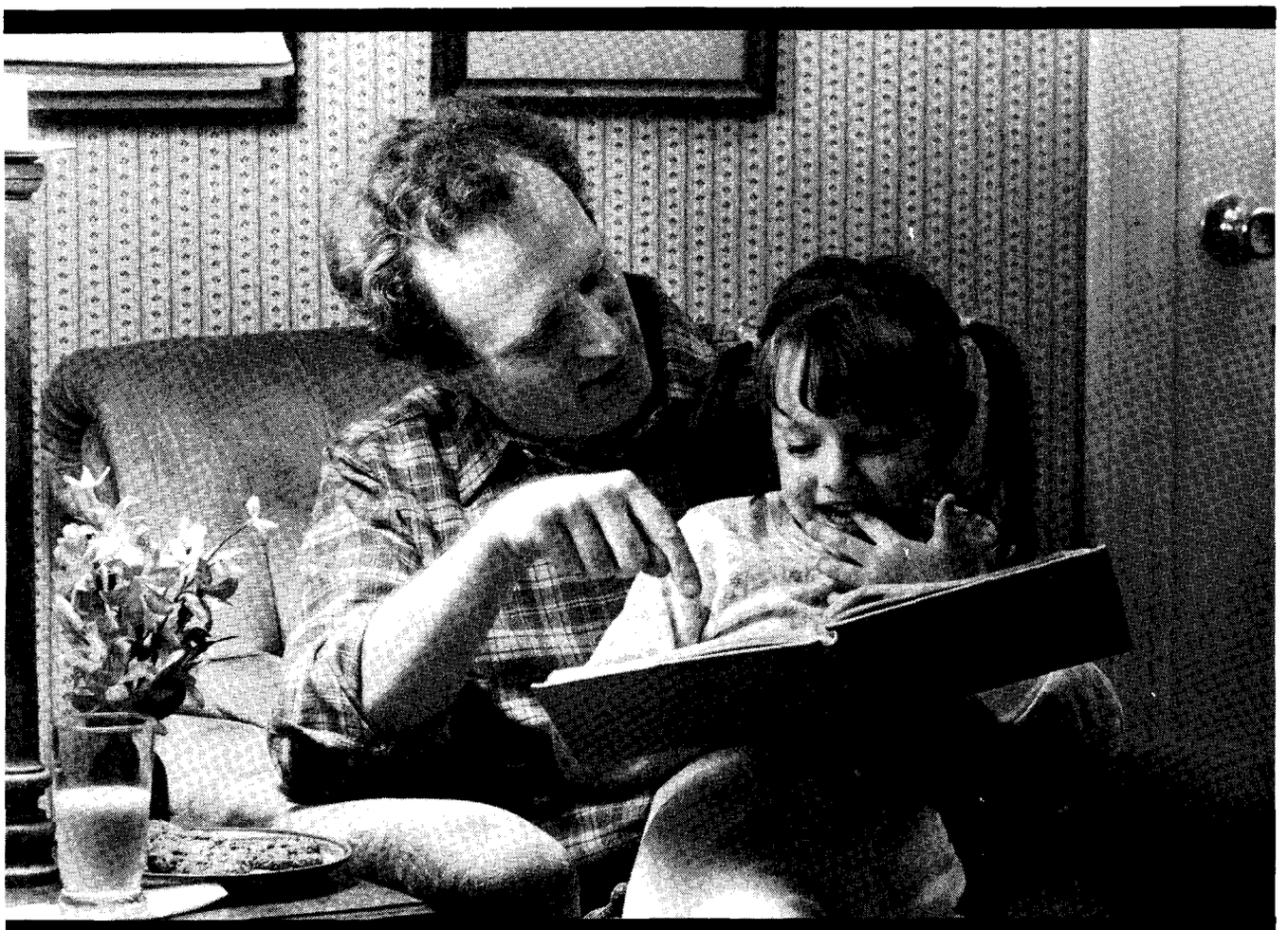

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ing out its fatuousness. What, exactly, is being asserted among all of these leaps of association? What do these platitudes and pontifications mean? How does Allen's movie "keep eight people in focus simultaneously" in a way that a Clint Eastwood movie doesn't? In what single respect does Allen's movie in any way resemble a novel by Handke, Robbe-Grillet, or Duras?

Note more generally how evasive this whole course of argument really is. After devoting the first paragraph to the "novelistic" quality of the film, and the second to the nouveau roman and its presumed relevance to a consideration of Allen's filmmaking, Canby typically unsays the connection in the first sentence of the third paragraph and replaces it with a much weaker assertion that the film "demonstrates literary techniques and devices," and then in the fourth paragraph changes course once again to urge some sort of unspecified connection between what Allen does and "the basis of all fiction." One cannot help feeling, finally, that half the effect of the passage depends on impressing the reader with Canby's putatively superior knowledge of writers like Handke, since anyone who really is familiar with the nouveau roman, or has recently read Duras, Robbe-Grillet, or Handke, would instantly detect the preposterousness of the allusions. Who (even more than Allen) is guilty of "dropping names" or "jumping around"?

BUT CANBY'S rhetoric and his saltatory form of argument are not reserved merely for high-toned films. Compare the following "Film View" description of *Alligator*, an unabashed piece of trash about an alligator who terrorizes the New York sewer system. This is a movie so bad that it has to be seen to be believed, but in treating it as a genre picture Canby conveniently manages to avoid harder tasks of analysis and substitutes in their place an effusion on the conventions of B-picture narrativity:

> The film meets its classic narrative obligations as carefully as a composer of a sonnet meets his obligations to a form. . . . The movie is as entertaining as it is because one can enjoy the real if rudimentary suspense on the screen, while also enjoying an awareness of what the moviemakers are up to. It's sort of like watching *Macbeth* for the dozenth time. You've seen it before. You know how it's going to end, but there's still the excitement of the variations included in this particular performance of a familiar piece.

Overlooking the dreary (and irrelevant) invocation of the sonnet form as an analogue for Hollywood's B-pictures, one still has to ask, what does this mean? Even allowing for the silliness of the argument, and the typically self-aggrandizing grandiosity of the analogies, the most disturbing aspect of this passage is what it reveals about Canby's attitude toward all art—not just films but sonnets, and Shakespeare too. After all, the literary references are meant to be taken seriously. Is this really, truly all that Canby gets from reading a poem or watching *Macbeth* once he knows "how it's going to end"?

LET ME offer a lexicon of Canby-ese, not to be churlish or picky about particular words and phrases, but in an honest effort to understand his aesthetic premises. We have already seen that the best scripts are "literary" (not to mention "literate"). Favorite terms of praise for a film are "sweet," "appealing," "charming," "beautiful," "handsome," "elegant," and "nice." The best performances are "convincing," "compelling," "effective," "believable," and "carry conviction." And the overall effect of a film that "works," and which is made by someone "who knows what he is doing" (preferably while being "high-spirited" and "not taking himself too seriously"), is that it is "fun," "enjoyable," and "entertaining" (three crucial terms in Canby's vocabulary), preferably while also being "sincere," "buoyant," "clever," "witty," and "funny," or demonstrating its "class" or "style."

What is wrong with this critical vocabulary? One does not have to be in favor of cinematic "ugliness" or "illiterateness," of performers who are not "believable" or "convincing," or of movies that are no "fun" or not "entertaining," to feel that the elevation of these particular values (to the exclusion of virtually all others) amounts to a very alarming aesthetic. It is precisely the chirpy, perky, sprightly character of these criteria of evaluation that is most disturbing. One is accustomed to seeing invocations of "charm," "handsomeness," and "fun" as measures of value in the Sunday *Times*—in ads for Calvin Klein, Christian Dior, Clinique, and Club Med. But these are hardly the supreme values that one would expect in a serious reflection on art and contemporary culture. They are, indeed, precisely the values such a reflection should question.

One might defend Canby's insistent attention to a film's "handsomeness" and "buoyancy" as just another sign of a generosity toward mediocre pictures, or as a polite attempt to put the cheeriest face on his responses to mediocre work, if it weren't for the fact that these terms are not reserved for inoffensively bad movies. They are Canby's supreme accolades for the films that will subsequently make his Ten Best list at the end of each year. What we have here, in sum, is only more "Fashions of the *Times*." Or to put it another way, Canby is always slumming. The most that a work of art can be is "entertaining," "stylish," "clever," or "appealing," because there is nothing really serious going on with it, nothing that will affect our lives outside the movies.

Of course high critical bromides—such as "style is content" (that chestnut actually appeared in a review of Brian De Palma's *Blow Out*) and "humanist values will never be superseded" (from another "Film View" column)—are thrown in for ballast, to keep the trifling from blowing away. But in the end, art is there to "entertain" us, and who dares ask more of it? It does not change our lives or our perceptions, it does not assault our prejudices, it does not move us to new ways of knowing and feeling. The experience of seeing even the best film is aesthetically equivalent to the enjoyment of the supper that follows it; both contribute to a "fun" or "entertaining" evening out. It is only because most people (film critics included) already unconsciously patronize movies that a critical approach like Canby's can seem even remotely adequate.

THE gentility of criticism in Canby's hands is made clear by the two general categories of film that he always receives well. They can be roughly called the "escapist / fantasy / camp / farce / or genre picture" film and the "realist / humanist / socially relevant / personal / or domestic drama" film. Examples of the first that Canby has praised in print are *Star Wars*, *Porky's*, *Body Heat*, *Poltergeist*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *E.T.*, *Dressed to Kill*, and *Blow Out*. Examples of the second are *Tootsie*, *Gandhi*, *Gregory's Girl*, *Nashville*, *My Dinner With André*, *Chan Is Missing*, and *Hannah and Her Sisters*. In short, if Lucas, Spielberg, De Palma, and genre picture makers everywhere are the patron saints of the first type, Altman, Pollack, Pakula, and Allen are the guardian angels of the second.

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Canby's receptivity to these different kinds of films might initially seem puzzling. After all, what could be more different from a slice-and-dice stomach turner like *Dressed to Kill* or *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* than a Masterpiece Theatre snooze like *Gandhi*? Or less resemble big-budget adventure extravaganzas like *Raiders* and *Star Wars* than a small-budget domestic drama like *Chan Is Missing* or an actor's vanity piece like *Tootsie* or *Private Benjamin*? To say that they are all films of different degrees of banality and different kinds of badness doesn't go far enough in the way of explaining Canby's fondness for them. What all of these films (as they are understood by Canby) have in common is that none of them threatens a settled, smug, complacently bourgeois sense of what constitutes "reality."

A vast *embourgeoisement* of criticism has taken place. It involves Herculean feats of misunderstanding on Canby's part. One has to disregard De Palma's horrifyingly heartless misogyny, and his sense of life as localized in the reptilian brain, to treat his films merely as ingenious stylistic experiments in genre picture making; or disregard Altman's cartoon sense of human interaction, and his sneering contempt for his own characters, to treat him as a social satirist of American manners and mores. But having done that, these two filmmakers (and others) become safe for Canby's appreciations of them.

THE escapist / fantasy / camp / farce / or genre picture doesn't threaten bourgeois reality simply because the first clause in its narrative contract with the audience is that it agrees never to impinge uncomfortably on it. All of the dramatic transactions in a fantasy film take place in the never-never land where Steven Spielberg's pictures are set, just as the camp or genre pictures Canby likes so much keep reminding us that they are just movies about movies, walled-off from the world outside of the movie theater by their self-referentiality and their rule-governed conventionality.

The socially relevant / personal / domestic dramas that Canby likes are equally tame, domesticated, and safe for mass consumption. They don't threaten his view of the world precisely because their value system is an absolutely uncritical extension of that world. The films of Lumet, Lean, Pakula, Malle, Allen, and Mazursky are almost always as eminently reasonable, sanely "humanistic" (in Canby's limiting sense of the term), and socially melioristic as Canby's own sense of life. They are films that the entire Upper West Side can, upon Canby's recommendation, see safely, with impunity, knowing that nothing is really at stake, that no sacred cows will be gored, that polite supper chat will not be affected by the film that precedes it.

CONSIDER the example of *Private Benjamin*, the Goldie Hawn vehicle, a film Canby liked well enough to nominate as one of the Ten Best of the year it appeared. Canby's approach to it is revealing of his entire way of looking at movies:

> [It] is the kind of service comedy that fell into disrepute during the Vietnam War, but which, before that, had been a staple in almost any year's release schedule. Everybody made them—Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, Martin and Lewis, Bob Hope, Chaplin, Keaton, even Cary Grant, who starred in Howard Hawks' classic *I Was a Male War Bride*.
>
> *Private Benjamin* is an old friend brought up to date in this woman's army, which Judy Benjamin joins under the impression she's signing up for an extended stay at some place like Elizabeth Arden's Main Chance. . . . Judy Benjamin is, as she puts it, "29 years old and trained to do nothing," the sort of woman whose second wedding day is almost ruined when an ottoman arrives upholstered in beige when she had distinctly ordered mushroom. . . .
>
> Miss Hawn, even when she must look sort of wilted, like the figure on the top of a week-old wedding cake, is totally charming as the bemused suburban princess who forsakes a house with a live-in maid, her membership in the country club, and her role as man's best friend to find life's meaning in the service. She's an enthusiastic farceur, but her characterization is so firmly based that she can slip from slapstick to romantic comedy and back without missing a beat. . . .
>
> *Private Benjamin* is funny, and every now and then, like Judy Benjamin, possessed of unexpected common sense. Judy is ultimately appealing because she's no dope. "I really didn't get the point of *An Unmarried Woman*," she says at one point. "I would have been Mrs. Alan Bates so fast." She could also be a movie critic.

This passage reveals still more of Canby's conception of art. There is the idea of a good film as "an old friend," and all the better, one ideally "possessed of . . . common sense." And there is Canby's use of the notion of "a kind of" film (in the first paragraph) and of "a sort of" character (in the second paragraph), which are two of his most

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common critical mannerisms. What both of these views assume is that the overall experience of a film, as well as the particular experiences presented within it, is ultimately reducible to a set of understandings and beliefs that exist outside the film, which could more or less be agreed upon before it ever begins. Even when he is not explicitly reducing films, events, and characters to "types," "sorts," and "kinds" as he does here, Canby's fundamental operating premise is that the purpose of a film is to present recognizable types, sorts, and kinds of experiences and characters (if it is not simply an escapist/fantasy movie, whose purpose is to leave intact and unsullied our repertory of types, sorts, and kinds). The greatest and most brilliant films imaginable, for Canby, only do the same thing that he describes in this review, in perhaps somewhat more detail or with more intricacy. A good film, in brief, is a film that confirms us in our prior understandings and conceptions.

THE bourgeois repressiveness and reactionary values implicit in Canby's writing are, alas, typical of so many other film critics' writing today. Canby is popular in part because his attitudes are so much of a piece with the premises of most film-goers and film reviewers, especially his admiration for genre or escapist garbage, and his pride in that admiration, as if it represented a kind of aesthetic radicalism and not simply another form of conservatism. Genre critics of Canby's stripe are legion—from television commentators like Neal Gabler, Leonard Maltin, and Gene Shalit, to journalistic reviewers like Richard Corliss, Richard Schickel, and Pauline Kael, to many of the academics running our major film schools.

They fool themselves into regarding their silly relish for the old, bad Hollywood B-picture, the genre-film remake, or the trashy escapist/fantasy flick, as a form of critical daring and artistic eclecticism. But they are, in effect, as aesthetically reactionary and culturally conservative as the old Legion of Decency. And perhaps more so: at least the old censorship organizations believed that something was at stake when a film violated bourgeois codes of morality and belief. Canby, Kael, and company either make such films conform to these codes (for example, by arguing, as a film colleague of mine does, that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is a film about the average American family) or consign them to an insulated, self-contained category of genre, so that what goes on within them never impinges on life outside the movies at all.

To call Canby's criticism culturally and artistically conservative, however, is really to understate the case. His *Times* aesthetic is extraordinarily resistant to everything that is artistically eccentric, socially or psychologically nonnormative, or narratively disruptive of socially sanctioned categories of experience. It is profoundly unreceptive to the very energies that the greatest and most interesting works of art release. Everything of value that occurs in such a work is, by definition, an assault on the received understandings of experience that we had before we encountered it. But if films expose us only to experiences that we recognize and comfortably understand, there is no point in seeing them, since we are not going to learn anything or be tested in any way.

CANBY claims to want wildness and energy and assault. On more than one occasion he has been heard to complain about the tameness or blandness of the films he reviews. But in practice, every time a film gets a little fresh with him, or a character or situation goes a little wild, he is the first to complain. The only kind of marginally original or innovative film that Canby can tolerate is the "sweet," "gentle," "charming," "humane" film like *Gregory's Girl*, *Chan Is Missing*, *My Dinner With André*, or any of John Sayles's efforts. For those unfamiliar with these particular films, I would point out that, whatever their other virtues, they are dependably "entertaining" in the blandest and most urbane sense of the word. But confront Canby with something *truly* passionate, energetic, or wild, and invariably he doesn't know what to do.

Of course one sheds no tears when Canby misjudges the run-of-the-mill Hollywood film. Such films—the vast majority of movies released in any given year—deserve their critics, who give no better than they get. The trouble arises when Canby becomes the critic of last resort for an eccentric or innovative small-budget film that desperately needs the free advertising of a good review in the *Times*, which may be the only general-interest publication in which it stands a chance of getting any coverage at all. The films I have in mind are some of the few authentic masterpieces of the last 15 years or so (all of them released during the period Canby has been at the *Times*): Barbara Loden's *Wanda*, Peter Hall's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Homecoming*, Robert Kramer's *Ice* and *Milestones*, Elaine May's *The Heartbreak Kid* and *Mikey and Nicky*, Paul Morrissey's *Trash*, *Flesh*, and *Heat*, John Cassavetes's *Minnie and Moskowitz*, *A Woman Under the Influence*, *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, and *Lovestreams*.

How has Canby treated them? In the same neutralizing manner that he applies to better-known movies: as "escapist/fantasy/genre" work or as "realist/humanist/socially relevant." Thus May's *Heartbreak Kid* is treated as a kind of screwball comedy of divorce, and her *Mikey and Nicky* as a variation on the buddy-boy films of the mid-seventies. John Cassavetes's *Minnie and Moskowitz* is treated as a fairy-tale romance movie, and his *Killing of a Chinese Bookie* as a hard-boiled film noir or gangster picture. Paul Morrissey's *Heat* is treated as a camp parody of Hollywood thirties romances. Canby's reviews (which may be just as insidious when he chooses not to damn but to praise) amount, then, to a kind of critical gentrification, in which the roughnesses are sanded down in the mill of the ordinary and the hard edges are smoothed away.

HERE IS Canby on Cassavetes's great *Minnie and Moskowitz*, a violent, wrenching exploration of the ravages of passion. One's heart sinks at the transformation of this rough, powerful film into a "contemporary fairy tale":

> *Minnie and Moskowitz* is a contemporary fairy tale about a youngish eccentric parking lot attendant (Seymour Cassel), who is essentially a middle-class Jewish prince in hippie disguise, and the very beautiful, mixed-up, middle-class gentile princess (Gena Rowlands), whose hand he wins in what is certain to be an idyllic, Maggie-and-Jiggs sort of marriage.

Or consider what he does to Paul Morrissey's *Trash*—a brilliant frontal attack on all of the bourgeois values that may be attributed to Canby himself. He completely deflects the attack by treating the film as a camp parody of earlier Hollywood movies:

> This second film by Paul Morrissey is a relentless send-up of attitudes and gestures shanghaied from Hollywood's glamorous nineteen-thirties and forties. . . . All feelings, all values are turned upside down and played for laughs, with the result that it's difficult for me to take *Trash* more seriously

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than it takes itself. . . . The dialogue is clever and the performances carry conviction, but never once did I have the impression that the movie had any intent other than entertainment as escapist as that offered by Dick Powell, Ruby Keeler, and James Cagney.

(Note that even the subversive nature of Cagney's art is lost on Canby. He misses the boat on more than just new movies.)

IF HE can't tame the imaginative wildness and exorbitance in a work of genius by means of genre-izing it, Canby's alternative tactic of domestication and control is to treat it as mere conventional naturalism. Confronted with a radically troubling work like Barbara Loden's *Wanda*, with its profoundly withdrawn title character, Canby reduces the ragged, eccentric figure to an unproblematic realistic "type." He brings into focus what was designed to stay out of focus. He kills the bizarre and troubling experience of a self in flight from self-expression by being so smugly knowing about what must have been intended to be expressed in the character (but which is the opposite of what was intended). In the process, he turns the strange and elusive into the banal, as he turns *Wanda* into what he patronizingly calls a "conventional first feature":

> [Wanda] is a rather dumb young woman in the Pennsylvania coal country who, when we meet her, is drifting out of a marriage to a factory worker she couldn't care less about, and at the very end, is sitting, rather numb and baffled, in a road house, with strangers, drinking a glass of beer and holding a wet cigarette. . . . Miss Loden's Wanda is unique and yet she's like hundreds of other youngish women you've probably seen sitting in bars in West Bend, Wisconsin, Lebanon, New Hampshire, or Urbanna, Virginia, wearing her toreador pants, her hair in curlers, ordering her beer by brand label (and putting up a fuss if the bartender doesn't have it) and, towards the end of the evening, drifting off with a man, more or less out of courtesy, since he did pick up the checks.

It's not that there is anything factually incorrect about this summary of events and types (though there is that extraordinary snobbishness of tone, and Canby's blatant condescension to a whole class of people). But Canby's dogged literalism is really a technique of pacification, as is his single-minded focus on character and plot summary. By reducing a narrative to its plot, and to a few psychological traits of its characters, the pressures of desire and imagination within it are forgotten. In the same way, *King Lear* could be called the story of a domestic dispute between an old man and his daughters. All of the more disturbing aspects of the play would blow away in the storm on the heath. Old fool! Why doesn't he just go inside and keep to his room?

PERHAPS THE secret of the success of Canby's critical approach is that it almost perfectly matches the assumptions of the men who make the studio productions he reviews. That is to say, his uncritical indulgence of *Raiders* or *E.T.* or *Porky's* as camp, farce, or escapist "entertainments," like his reverence for the humane, civilized, wise, charming, and literate *Gandhi*, *Manhattan*, *Tootsie*, or *Kramer vs. Kramer*, flawlessly mirrors the (often good) intentions of the artistic middlebrows involved in the projects themselves. That is why his criticism so often reads as if it were co-written by the studio publicity departments that promote the films. Canby's intuitive grasp of the studio mentality doesn't mean, however, that he is the ideal critic for its films. Quite the opposite: as someone who has unconsciously internalized the value systems of the people who produce and promote them, he is probably the individual least qualified to understand and analyze these bourgeois systems of belief, these codes of naive realism, and the tamely, genially earnest humanism that these producers, directors, and actors confuse with art.

The real tragedy of Vincent Canby's 16 years at the *Times* is not that he sends thousands to the likes of *Porky's*, *Tootsie*, *Private Benjamin*, *Raiders*, *Nashville*, *Dressed to Kill*, *Blow Out*, or *Manhattan*. These films would probably have audiences in any case. It is that the vulgarity of his criticism—his taste for the glitzy, the tame, the trashy, the escapist, the entertaining, the safely bourgeois morality play—has misrepresented or failed to appreciate almost every one of the two or three dozen genuine works of greatness that have appeared at the movies during his tenure at the *Times*. He was in the position to identify, as a kind of advance messenger, the best in the year's films. Instead he has pandered to a view of the ultimate possibilities of human expression that can be satisfied by the works of Woody Allen, Brian De Palma, or David Lean. One longs for the day when the writing on film at the *Times* will be at least as passionate, as intelligent, as well-informed as the writing on the sports page.

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FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Homo Sovieticus
by Alexander Zinoviev
translated by Charles Janson

(The Atlantic Monthly Press, 208 pp., $17.95)

Is there any truth, after all, in the perverse paradox which holds that creativity can flourish only in the foul air of oppression, whereas a breeze of freedom makes it wither? Being an émigré myself, I'd rather dismiss it as a bogus generalization. As much as I hate to admit it, however, the career of Alexander Zinoviev is a case in point: since his expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1978 he has not written a single book that can stand comparison with his earlier satirical masterpieces, *The Yawning Heights* and *The Radiant Future*. For an admirer of these two works, to read *Homo Sovieticus* is an embarrassing experience. While employing the same kind of eclectic technique, this book has nothing in common with the ironic ambiguity and comic force of Zinoviev's first novels.

The book is "disquieting," as its publisher claims, not in what it says but in its predictability, monotony, and flatness. If it's supposed to be a satire, it is an odd kind of satire, completely devoid of humor. If it's supposed to be a political analysis, it lacks convincing argumentation. If it's supposed to be a self-portrait of the title creature, it is a portrait painted without the necessary distance. The first-person narrator is, in fact, doing his best to repel us by his constant bumptiousness, the product of his unshaken belief in his own intellectual superiority. At the same time, his half-baked opinions and sweeping generalizations leave us no doubt that he hardly has the right to claim superiority in anything intellectual. Let us listen to the characteristic ring of his crude sarcasm mixed with categorical self-assertion:

> In the West clever and educated people call us *Homo Sovieticus*. They are proud to have discovered the existence of this type of man and thought up such a beautiful name for him. Moreover they use this term in what is for us a derogatory and contemptuous sense. It has never occurred to them that we have actually done something, more than simply finding a name for ourselves, that we were the first to develop this type of man, while it took the West 50 years after this to invent a new little term for it; and the West reckons that its contribution to history was infinitely greater than ours. The conceit of the West deserves our mockery.

After a couple of statements of this sort, even the most patient reader begins to yawn.

The feeble outlines of Zinoviev's plot, and its sketchy characters, are these: First, the narrator is a specimen of Homo Sovieticus. Second, Homo Sovieticus is a "new type of man" created by the powerful, attractive force of an ideology that satisfies his desire to be part of "the collective" and thus be relieved from individual responsibility. Third, this "new type of man" is an indestructible and unchangeable phenomenon, which will not only survive but prove victorious. Fourth, this means that the Soviet system will ultimately conquer the earth, especially since the West is weak, divided, naive, shortsighted, and gutless. Fifth, the inevitability of the future triumph of communism casts a new light on contemporary issues and makes us assume that virtually everything that is going on in the world—from the demonstrations of Western pacifists to the hunger strikes of Soviet dissidents—is just a component of a "Great Attack on the West," cleverly orchestrated by the KGB. In the final analysis, there is no such thing as a spontaneous and sincere defense of freedom, justice, and human dignity, since even the force-fed dissidents or expelled émigrés are, either actually or "objectively," Soviet agents. (According to the narrator, "A man can be an ASS [Agent of the Soviet State] without knowing that he is one.")

There is something utterly boring in the narrator's personality, in his combination of primitiveness and presumptuousness, with added touches of paranoia, chauvinism, intolerance, and other equally attractive features. What develops before us is the self-portrait of a mind with restricted horizons and unrestricted arrogance. Since the action takes place among Soviet émigrés in Germany, let's use a German and a Soviet term: his mentality is that of a typical *Besserwisser* from the *nomenklatura*.

Not a nice person to be with, that's for sure. But let's give Zinoviev the benefit of the doubt. Maybe this was exactly his intent. After all, the book is supposed to be a clinical study of Homo Sovieticus, "the product of human adaptation to certain social conditions." Therefore, the first-person narration could be considered a device that serves to present this type of human being from within, by means of self-portrayal. As in every dramatic monologue, this sort of presentation gives the author a chance to distance himself from the speaker, to make the narrator unwittingly unmask and compromise himself and thus turn self-portrayal into ironic self-betrayal. There are, to repeat, some reasons to suspect that this was indeed Zinoviev's intent. In his foreword he says:

> This book is about Soviet Man. He is a new type of man, *Homo Sovieticus*. We will shorten him to Homosos. I have a dual relationship with this new being: I love him and at the same time I hate him; I respect him and I despise him. I am delighted with him and I am appalled by him. I myself am a Homosos. Therefore I am merciless and cruel when I describe him. Judge us, because you yourselves will be judged by us.

"Merciless and cruel"? To my taste, there is far more love than hate in this relationship. There is, in other words, not enough ironic distance between the author and his narrator. At the very least, there is no evidence in the text of the author's "despising" the narrator or being "appalled" by him. What was most striking in Zinoviev's early books was precisely his ability to multiply ironic mirrors, to play upon varying degrees of identification and distance between the author and his characters. In *Homo Sovieticus* the distance has all but disappeared. "I myself am a Homosos."

This entails, by the way, some cognitive paradoxes reminiscent of the parable about a Cretan who said all Cretans were liars. Since one of the chief characteristics of Homo Sovieticus is his indifference toward the distinction between truth and lie, is a Homo Sovieticus who confesses such indifference lying or telling the truth? In the final analysis, the first-person monologue of an exemplary Homosos totally misses the mark as a rhetorical device: we have no reason to trust a single word of his, including his self-description.

Apart from self-description, however, there is also a great deal of indirect self-

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presentation in the narrator's monologue. In fact, only these indirect clues provide any reliable material for speculation on the nature of Homosos. One crucial clue of this sort is the dictatorial, manipulative dominance of the narrator over the reality represented. His plot and his characters are really no more than a chessboard and a set of pawns (black only) for the narrator's own game of self-affirmation. The rules are simple and consistent, as is every case of megalomania cum paranoia.

It's not difficult to penetrate the layers of the narrator's beliefs and detect the undersoil of totalitarian mentality beneath them. Its chief ingredients, as they reveal themselves in the course of the narrator's monologue, are: the cult of strength and brute force; the division of the world into "us" and "them"; contempt for the individual and idolatry of "the collective"; immorality and relativism, that is to say, a deliberate blurring of the borderlines between good and evil and between truth and lie.

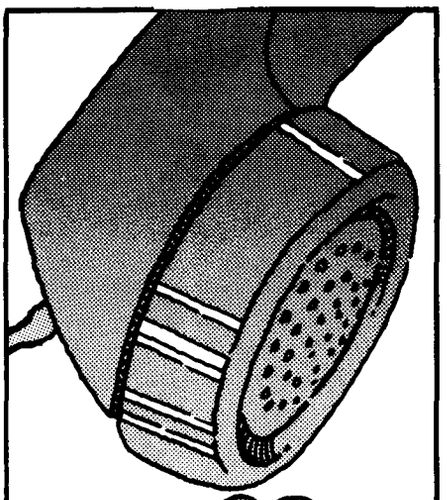
THIS understood, one cannot really wonder why Zinoviev's narrator so condescendingly ridicules the West, the system of parliamentary democracy, the individualistic and humanitarian set of values that molds the mentality of a typical Westerner. He simply hates and despises Homo Occidentalis as the exact opposite of Homo Sovieticus, that is, himself—an opposite that seems to him infinitely weaker and ultimately doomed. Even taking into account Zinoviev's love/hate relationship with his hero, it is obvious that at least at this point the perspectives of the author and his narrator do converge: this utter contempt for the decayed West is also the attitude of the writer himself. Whatever his credibility as Homo Sovieticus, his hatred of Homo Occidentalis is beyond any doubt.

It would be interesting to compare Zinoviev's views with those of some of the harshest critics of Western passivity in the face of the totalitarian threat, such as Solzhenitsyn, or Jean-François Revel. Revel is clearly aware that the democracies *can* perish, and he writes in order to ward off the disaster; while being critical, he still speaks on behalf of the West and the Western system of values. Solzhenitsyn (in his Harvard speech, for instance) goes a step further and finds the main source of democracies' weaknesses in the essence of democracy itself. But even this ambiguous argument still results from his desire to stave off the totalitarian monster.

For Zinoviev, however, the monster has a human face—the face of Homo Sovieticus, the inevitable conqueror of the Western world. He "loves and hates" him, "respects and despises" him. But there is no shred of evidence in his book that he has anything except hate and contempt for the Western democracies. If we were to heed his advice, the only means of putting up successful resistance would be for the West to produce its own version of Homosos. I don't know about the rest of the West, but as far as I'm concerned, no thanks.

BESIDES, I could be convinced of the superiority of Homo Sovieticus only if I were sure of his existence. It's amusing that the structure of Zinoviev's reasoning resembles the structure of communist ideology. It seems to be a charmingly logical system, but only if we forget the fact that its fundamental premise is wrong. What's wrong, to be precise, is Zinoviev's basic assumption that political systems can be described in terms of the uniform and stable "new types of men" they produce. To speak of an unchangeable, exceptionless, absolute "type" of Homo Sovieticus is just as gross an oversimplification as to say that all Irishmen are red-haired. It's even more wrong than that, in fact, because an actual red-haired Irishman cannot change his hair color naturally, whereas an actual Homo Sovieticus can change his ideological coloring. Witness, for example, the "thaw" of 1956: after many years of the seemingly total devastation of people's souls, even a minimal political relaxation was enough for the human hope for freedom and justice to resurface. Most of the people who heeded the voice of that hope in subsequent years (those who survived, that is) are now either in exile or in labor camps. I wonder how an inmate of a Siberian camp might feel when told by Zinoviev that objectively he is a Homo Sovieticus too.

Zinoviev is far more of an expert on the reality of the Soviet Union than most of his readers, this reader included. But I dare say most of his readers can claim greater insight into the reality of a human soul, since Zinoviev apparently doesn't know much about it. At least he doesn't seem to realize that his theory of Homosos is every bit as false as any absolute generalization superimposed on the natural diversity and dynamics of the human world. A little



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common sense and a little knowledge of history are enough to convince one that all proclamations of the arrival of "a new type of man," whether their tone is triumphant or menacing, are just simplistic fallacies.

Obviously I do not mean to deny the existence of fundamental differences between political systems, societies, and systems of values. Nor am I trying to belittle the extent of the spiritual desolation of which Soviet totalitarianism is guilty. The views of a New England pacifist who, after a brief visit to Moscow and a conversation with a KGB informer disguised as a physician, becomes convinced that the Soviet people are exactly like us, are just as wrong as Zinoviev's insistence that Homo Sovieticus has nothing in common whatsoever with Western man. Finally the truth must lie somewhere in between Dr. Alexander Zinoviev and Dr. Bernard Lown.

STANISLAW BARANCZAK

Stanislaw Baranczak, a Polish author who came to the United States in 1981, is professor of Polish literature at Harvard University.

EXILES FROM ROMANCE

The Country Girls Trilogy by Edna O'Brien

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 532 pp., $18.95)

Since publishing her first novel, *The Country Girls*, in 1960, Edna O'Brien has written continually of the same lessons: that experience is mean compensation for lost innocence; that women ruin themselves through both passivity and passion; that the exile from ignorant country life never becomes wholly urbanized and sophisticated, but merely confused or false, a misfit wherever she goes. It is a she O'Brien writes mainly about—about the psychology of women, and of two women in particular: innocent, sentimental Caithleen Brady and worldly, pragmatic Baba Brennan, whom we follow in these three volumes from their childhood homes in the west of Ireland to a convent school, to Dublin, and then to London, middle age, and a host of disappointments.

The final volume of the trilogy, caustically titled *Girls in Their Married Bliss*, was published in 1963, but O'Brien had not yet finished chronicling the decline of these two beautifully delineated characters, opposites and yet best friends. In short stories written as late as the 1980s, O'Brien has resurrected them by name, and now she has written an epilogue for the trilogy (published in one volume for the first time) in which, however, only Baba survives. The reader may be consoled to remember that O'Brien, for all her pessimism, is gaily unfettered by the "facts" of her own fictions: the Kate who never got to college in these novels does get there for the purposes of a gemlike short story, "Sister Imelda," written years later. Perhaps in the 1990s, Kate will not have died after all.

Yet even if O'Brien never writes about her again, the touching portrait of the teenage Kate in *The Country Girls* (which seems, in some degree, to be a portrait of the artist as a young woman) survives. And the happy permanence of art continues to render this artist's truest and saddest message—that nothing in life is permanent—a good deal easier to bear. Rereading this astonishingly accomplished first novel some years after my first acquaintance with it, I was as surprised as Kate is once by a bad telegram—"I read it again. It said exactly the same thing"—but surprised by joy, not sorrow. There it was again, the nearly impossible trick pulled off: Kate narrates in her own ingenuous voice, and yet with O'Brien the novelist's skill and wisdom.

And in O'Brien's hands Kate revives a cast of finely remembered childhood characters: the family workman, Hickey, who cooks pullet's eggs for Kate and smiles at her with green teeth; her drunken, profligate father, who boasts of how well he cares for his family; her doleful mother, who allots every Saturday night to soaking her feet and paring her corns with a razor blade; her exploitative, beautiful friend Baba, who continually insults and humiliates her ("You're a right-looking eejit!" is her favorite refrain). It *is* surprising, really, how happy one feels reading this novel—for its news, if not as unrelentingly bad as what will follow, is far from good. Kate's mother is drowned; Kate and Baba spend miserable, if hilariously described, years in a convent school and then—worse—are expelled when Baba convinces Kate to co-author an obscenity about a nun. Baba, who never had Kate's talent for study, is sent on to commercial school, but bookish Kate has no money, and is reduced to working as a grocery shop girl and to dreaming of nothing but romance.

All that dreaming of men, and no thinking about her own plans regardless of them, will one day be Kate's undoing. But in the meantime there is the intoxication of her first, not-quite-consummated affair. At 14, and for some four years after, she finds herself wooed by a married, middle-aged Frenchman who is the awe of all the poor Irish in town, and whom they all address without the slightest irony as Mr. Gentleman. (I can think of few nicknames in literature that make me laugh every time I read them, as does this one and Mrs. Gentleman.) Townspeople call him Mr. Gentleman for his riches and refinement, but he is aptly named as Kate's lover, too: never again will a man treat her so gallantly, nor will she love another man so much. And she loves him with a delectable wantonness, whose contrast with her inexperience lends this novel so much of its charm and humor:

> He smoked little cigars and threw the butts out the window.
>
> "Are they horrible?" I asked. I had to say something.
>
> "Here, try one," he said, and he took the cigar out of his mouth and handed it to me. I was thinking of his mouth, of the shape of it, and the taste of his tongue, while I had one short, self-conscious puff. I began to cough at once. I said it was worse than horrible, and he laughed. He drove very fast.

Conveying so well the freshness of Kate's first passion, O'Brien wisely allows her, nonetheless, to speak in a teenager's romantic clichés: "When he walked into the room I knew that I loved him more than life itself." Only when Kate's life is done—in the epilogue she is drowned like her mother, and fittingly, for both of them in life were drowned in longing—does one see how unfortunately prophetic the cliché has proved. Men

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are Kate's life, and when they disappoint or disappear (her first such loss, which concludes *The Country Girls* like a little death, is Mr. Gentleman's failing to arrive for a tryst) there is no life. In time the alternatives for such a woman reduce to death—either her own, as in Kate's probably suicidal drowning, or her lover's, as occurs in O'Brien's 1977 novel, *I Hardly Knew You*.

FOR MOST of O'Brien's characters, love has no prime; it lasts for an instant after an eternity of more pleasurable expectation. Like Mr. Gentleman, who avoids consummating his affair with Kate lest the innocence that attracts him be spoiled, the murderess in *I Hardly Knew You* (though with a pathological difference) kills her far younger lover before he has had time to mistreat her. She asks in self-exoneration, "Haven't I always been attending to a him, and dancing attendance on a him, and being slave to a him and being trampled on by a him?"

The first buried prophecy of Kate's obsession with men comes even earlier in *The Country Girls* than the introduction of Mr. Gentleman, although as O'Brien wrote the first paragraph of her first novel she had almost certainly not projected that the obsession would prove fatal: "I did not know why my heart was beating faster than usual. Then I remembered. He had not come home." Unidentified "he's" and "him's" populate Kate's narration of *The Country Girls*, and to a lesser extent the second volume, *The Lonely Girl*, as if she expects us to agree that men are all that matter in the world, but also as if we know that they are all the same. In the first scene, the "he" who does not come home is Kate's father, off on a bender. Later that father figure Mr. Gentleman will not take her to Vienna as he promised; and *The Lonely Girl* ends as Kate's first real lover, Eugene Gaillard, another older, married man with a French name, breaks her heart by failing to follow her to the Dublin docks, where she had dreamed he would prevent her from sailing to England. (The "escape" from Ireland to England is, time and again in O'Brien's work, really the expulsion from Eden.)

But Eugene is not nearly so perfect as Mr. Gentleman: no real lover could be. Mr. Gentleman's superiority over Kate was largely the natural result of age and experience; but Eugene adds to that superiority something ugly, the gloating triumph of a sophisticated man over an intelligent but untutored girl. The tone of the trilogy shifts (perhaps too abruptly) from bittersweet and funny to bitter and ironic when in the third volume, *Girls in Their Married Bliss*, a new narrator enters. Acidulous Baba opens with the news that Eugene has divorced his first wife and married very pregnant Kate. It is a stale and inauspicious beginning for a marriage, and for a novel, too. What saddened us in the first two novels was Kate's losing a man, and now the problem is that she has nabbed one. It seems at least as much O'Brien's failure as Eugene's that he has changed from a complex man—charming, but with some serious faults—into a villain. In a matter of a few pages the marriage shows itself to be essentially over: Kate is already having a mawkish (again unconsummated) affair with a married man. Eugene discovers them; and so begins the distasteful, familiar soap opera of divorce, child-custody battles, and promiscuity far less exciting than those early kisses.

I HAVE asked myself off and on since I first read *The Country Girls* whether in preferring it to its successors I am merely preferring innocence to experience, which is no literary judgment; whether in finding *Girls in Their Married Bliss* sometimes maddeningly, boringly grim I am unfairly shooting the messenger of bad news. Probably, though, *The Country Girls* is the best of these books because Edna O'Brien happens to be supremely talented—quite as talented as that American genius J. D. Salinger—in conveying the pains and thrills of adolescence, when in our intensity and insecurity we are all pretty much alike. It is in the adulthood of O'Brien's characters, when the hells they discover within their formed personalities ought to seem subtly distinct, that her talent for the universal lapses at times into unconvincing generalization and stereotype. Kate is not all women, although O'Brien occasionally implies that she is (rather inconsistently too, considering that Baba, her opposite, is also quintessentially female). Kate is a particular woman who—finally, by her own admission—has destroyed herself:

> It was . . . the first time she realized that her interest in people was generated solely by her needs, and bitterly she thought of the little girl—herself—who had once cried when a workman stuck a pitchfork through his foot.

A trenchant realization: to be a romantic is not necessarily to know how to love. And to be bookish is not necessarily to know how to read. We once saw *Anna Karenina* in young Kate's hands, but clearly she gleaned no connection between where she was headed and where Anna, similarly in love with being loved, would end. Is the only alternative to the way Kate lives no love at all? It is cannier, O'Brien hints, to be like Baba—never to fall in love, but never to miss it.

"We want to live," Baba declared to Kate at 18. "Drink gin. Squeeze into the front of big cars and drive up outside big hotels. We want to go places." Kate meekly differs: "But we want young men. Romance. Love and things . . ." Decades later, when Kate is despondent at having lost everything she wanted, Baba has long been married to a rich, ineffectual man she has never loved or desired, and is quite content with the arrangement. Baba's pursuit of extramarital sex is ultimately less dangerous than Kate's pursuit of love, as is proved when Baba's husband even agrees to raise as his own the child she has conceived with a lover. When he asks plaintively, however, "Why did you do it to me?" Baba's unspoken answer beautifully echoes and enlarges upon her speech to Kate at 18:

> Useless to say that I hadn't thought of him while I was doing it. Useless to say that I always thought your acquaintanceship with one person had nothing to do with another. Or to say all the things that went on in my head, the longings, for songs, cigarettes, dark bars, telegrams, cacti, combs in your hair, the circus, nights out, life. He wouldn't understand.

How wryly persuasive Baba is! Underneath her cynicism she remains, as her husband calls her, "an old soldier." And she is, despite her intellectual slackness and incapacity for romantic love, a soldier on behalf of certain aspirations for life wider than her more thoughtful friend Kate ever understood. The shift to Baba's narration in the third volume may be a signal of O'Brien's artistic surrender of Kate, who has become so tritely vul-

"YUGOSLAVIA is pinning its economic hopes on Western sales of a new line of subcompact cars, featuring the Yugo. Listing at $3,990, the Yugo is a real ripoff. CBS interviewed one Yugo owner who recalled the car filling with blue smoke. He turned off the ignition, but the motor kept running and the smoke billowing until his wife, with sure intuition, switched off the lights. All in all, the Yugo seems to rate somewhere between Edsel and Chernobyl."

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nerable a character that she has lost even the authority to speak for herself. Kate literally pares away at that self—*Girls in Their Married Bliss* ends with her gratuitous decision to be sterilized—until death is the only diminishment that can follow. When it arrives in the epilogue we now have, O'Brien gilds the funereal lily. On top of Kate's tragedy she piles Baba's melodrama: her illegitimate daughter has grown up a parody of the callous teenager the 1980s are supposed to have fostered, and her husband has been further emasculated by a paralyzing stroke. O'Brien apparently doesn't trust us to believe that Kate's end signifies the universal failure of hope. And yet why should we believe it? Overburdened Baba—as if battling against the author who so spiritedly created her long ago, and who now leaves her in the spotlight—continues to speak with foulmouthed courage and even humor. It is not only because we remember the young, dreamy Kate of that perfect and perfectly intact beginning, *The Country Girls*, that we come away from her finished story feeling at least a little glad.

MARY JO SALTER

Mary Jo Salter is the author most recently of a collection of poems, *Henry Purcell in Japan* (Knopf).

THE WANING OF THE ARISTOCRACY

Society, Government, and the Enlightenment: The Experiences of Eighteenth-Century France and Prussia by C. B. A. Behrens

(Harper & Row, 248 pp., $20)

As the intellectual fortunes of Marx fall, those of Tocqueville are likely to rise. Tired of class conflict, historians of the ancien régime, and especially of its spectacular end, are now enthusiastically embracing the alternative account in which a social system destroyed itself without significantly changing the governmental system. There is much to be said for such a view. Over 50 years ago, Joseph Schumpeter, who is not recalled as often as he should be, noted in a pair of brilliant essays that Europe's hereditary elites had actually remained in charge of the governments of most countries. Moreover, this atavistic and aggressive caste, untouched by the civilizing influence of the commercial and humanitarian impulses of the middle classes, was responsible for constant and ruinous imperialistic warfare.

As C. B. A. Behrens notes at the outset of her serious study of 18th-century government, it would have been impossible for Proust to write his masterpiece if the old aristocracy had really been socially displaced by the bourgeoisie a hundred years earlier. A look at either the French or German officer corps at that time should suffice to disabuse anyone of a too-simple view of the succession of ruling classes in modern Europe. And to the extent that their philosophy of history is at all permeable by empirical evidence, Marxist historians have been left in some disarray by these rather obvious considerations. Tocqueville, with his belief in the political continuity of the modern bureaucratic state before and after the revolution, has fared rather better. Still, he overestimated the extent of aristocratic displacement. Behrens shows that his facts are often inadequate or awry, and that many of his brilliant generalizations do not survive severe scrutiny. But what remains is pretty impressive, and she has followed him to good effect.

Tocqueville claimed that the ancien régime destroyed itself, rather than being accosted by such aliens in its midst as new rising classes or (as the counterrevolutionaries argued) a conspiracy of religious subversives. To find out what really happened, Behrens has undertaken, following his example, a comparison of French and Prussian political experiences in the age of absolutism. The matching of the institutions of government of two such diverse states is a very delicate task. It is only by judiciously balancing both the similarities and the differences—rather than overemphasizing either—that we can get any illumination from comparative institutional history. This is the main object of Behrens's solid and instructive book, which is also surprisingly readable, considering how deadly administrative history often can be. Though no new material is introduced, Behrens's story is particularly persuasive because she relies so heavily on the actual words of the participants in, and observers of, the events she discusses.

The French nobility was the richest class in France. Their legal privileges were considerable and often resented, but they were far from immune to taxation, nor were they particularly averse to the ennoblement of rich commoners. What they did want to prevent was the entry of new noblemen into the officer corps, which had long been their source of honor, as well as of livelihood for the poorer members among them. They were eager, moreover, to serve the absolutist state, and continued to play an important part at every level of its administration. Noblemen were, in short, neither as rigid, nor as superfluous, nor as suicidal as Tocqueville thought. They relied on the king and he on them; and since military glory was the essence of royal ideology in both France and Prussia, there was a real ethical harmony between the absolute rulers and their old nobility. Nor was the bourgeoisie simply disaffected. Its upper levels were, in fact, notoriously conservative.

The fissures were to be found, rather, in another part of the political canvas. The real trouble was a bureaucracy that simply did not function. Its civilians could not collect adequate or fair taxes, or even construct estimates, to finance a succession of wars that the military regularly lost at ruinous human and financial costs. Prussia, poor and underdeveloped compared to France, also engaged in a series of impoverishing wars, but at least its soldiers ultimately won them, and the king paid for them out of the well-calculated revenue of his own domains. Until Napoleon confronted them with a genuinely modern army, Prussia's militaristic rulers saw no reason to reform.

Otto von Bismarck dominated a Prussia that was in many ways recognizably the same as Frederick the Great's. The military and the universities had been brought up to date, the serfs freed, and that was all. The legal system had already been put in place by Frederick and had long been admired by all educated Europeans. Localized and subject to both royal and noble interference, it was nevertheless fair, honest, and prompt. The rules of

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law were rationally codified, the judiciary reasonably well-educated and upright, and (compared to other countries) quite independent. By contrast, the French king and his immediate ministers were obliged to interfere in procedures constantly, not because they were more arbitrary than their Prussian opposite numbers, but because there was nowhere else to go for a final decision, particularly in cases involving the numberless conflicting corporate groups and localities. Justice was simply not served, and everyone had reason to complain bitterly.

Both Prussian and French absolutist rulers governed a traditional society of orders. In a society of orders there are those who pray, those who fight, and those who produce. The kings were part of the second order, but in Prussia they also had a sense of having to hold the state together by some degree of rational policymaking and personal effort. In France, however, every effort to improve the performance of the administration not only failed to increase the royal revenues, but also splintered an already-divided society. Therefore reform was ad hoc and consisted in adding officials, who only confused matters and aggravated the general state of mutual suspicion and bureaucratic conflict.

Prussia was a far more "Gothic" society, but it was also more docile toward royal demands. The kings were, for instance, able to engage in central economic management beyond anything Louis XIV's finance minister, Jean Baptiste Colbert, could achieve. Religious toleration also was an advantage. It brought the productive Huguenot refugees from France to Prussia. Even the Jews were put to use: damaged state-produced goods were simply dumped on them, and they were forced to buy them on pain of expulsion. It was not despotic behavior that ruined an absolutist regime, evidently. Incompetence did the rulers in. Prussia had two exceptionally able kings who were served by some very intelligent ministers, many of them in-and-out teachers at one of the universities. But the last Bourbons were hopeless, and so were many of their political advisers. That brought the entire system into contempt and rendered its inequities intolerable.

The French Revolution casts such a long shadow that it is difficult to forget about it when one considers the century preceding it. Behrens's main topic, however, is not the end, but the character, of the absolute state. In both Catholic France and Protestant Prussia, the kings held their power directly from God. In principle, neither one recognized any limit on it, whether clerical or social. In practice, however, royal omnipotence was unimaginable, given limited resources and the accretion of local powers and customs. Still, the king was the state, or at least its first servant. Territorial aggrandizement and glory were what a king was supposed to pursue, and both the Prussian and the French rulers did.

THE NEEDS of the state were defined in entirely military terms. The burdens of warfare fell most heavily on the peasantry, who shared none of the benefits of society. They were exploited, oppressed, and unproductive, whether they were nominally free as in France or tied to the land as in Prussia. They had neither the means nor the incentive to change their ways, and though everyone talked about improving agriculture, nobody did anything about it. Arbitrary taxation and law enforcement heightened the peasants' natural suspiciousness and ignorance, and a sub-subsistence diet did not make them receptive to even benevolent reforms. In any case, many of these (such as enclosures) were of no immediate advantage to the 85 percent of Frenchmen who were peasants. Things were no better in Prussia. In both countries some middle-class producers were doing well, but in France no one saw any great productive advances, while in Prussia things seemed to be improving merely because conditions were better than they had been in the many decades following the destruction wrought by the Thirty Years War a century earlier.

The reason that nothing worked in official France can be traced to the venality of offices. The privatization of public functions, which had begun as a quick fix for the royal debt, was soon universal. Only the very highest officers of state were chosen "for merit." All the rest bought or inherited their charges. These were often their only investment and their only source of income; social positions depended entirely upon them. Taxation was farmed out to individuals who saw to it that their original outlay was covered, and that a steady income was derived from soaking the peasants. Little of this revenue ever reached the public treasury. Judicial officers were too concerned with the precedences and prestige of their valuable positions to attend trials. The seigneurial courts, therefore, were not nearly as unpopular as the seigneurial dues. The crown, once the system was established, had no choice but simply to put up more and more offices for sale. Its take from their resale was small; it could do little to improve the judicial process. Again, by contrast, there was none of this in Prussia. Its kings were thrifty, calculating, and industrious—mentally bourgeois, though they also favored their nobility in every way and ignored the peasantry. Moreover, they were undeniably public-minded in their outlook and practices.

Behrens has little to say about religion, or about the two very different Enlightenments of France and Prussia. With the single exception of Kant, Prussian academics were a servile lot. Frederick the Great was reduced to importing Frenchmen to staff his Royal Academy. In this respect France, with its vocal public opinion and many contentious academies, had all the advantages of a more complex and richer society. It also had its free intellectuals, pretty much as they are now. Censorship was a great nuisance, but by the end of the century it was becoming less onerous, and religious persecution was not what it had been in Louis XIV's reign. There were brilliant salons, and a genuinely elegant court; and while many philosophes visited and flattered Frederick the Great, none stayed very long.

There is a very funny letter by D'Alembert in which he describes dinner at the Prussian court. The king would speak only in French and addressed all his remarks to his visitor. The rest of the guests, all Prussian officials, slurped their soup in utter silence. D'Alembert couldn't wait to get home to Paris. In the end, that may have been the greatest difference: to paraphrase Kant, neither Prussia nor France was an enlightened society, but the latter at least had the possibility of becoming one.

JUDITH N. SHKLAR

Judith N. Shklar is John Cowles Professor of Government at Harvard University.

FISH

When you stand on the bank awash
in sun the fish dart slant-
wise through your upraised hand,
all gold, glinting, nerve-ends
quicker than flesh so
be humble. Don't even try
to change your life.

JOYCE CAROL OATES

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THE INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

Studies in Impressionism
by John Rewald
edited by Irene Gordon and Frances Weitzenhoffer

(Abrams, 232 pp., 119 illustrations, $37.50)

Studies in Post-Impressionism
by John Rewald
edited by Irene Gordon and Frances Weitzenhoffer

(Abrams, 295 pp., 75 illustrations, $37.50)

Consider the case of John Rewald, author of the best-selling and widely translated *History of Impressionism*, first published in 1946. Now in his seventies and conducting only the occasional graduate seminar, he has retired from a brief but distinguished teaching career at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, which is in the process of establishing a chair in his honor. He was recently named an honorary trustee of the Museum of Modern Art, where he was guest curator and wrote catalogs for some of its most memorable exhibitions. As a refugee scholar who arrived in New York during World War II, he was befriended by Alfred Barr, MOMA's first director. Rewald has been adviser and private curator to the late John Hay Whitney and to Paul Mellon, and thus helped form two of the greatest private collections of Impressionist and Postimpressionist art of our time.

The record of his achievements is dazzling; his impressive bibliography puts many of today's art historians to shame. Yet a little more than a decade ago, he was forced to commute weekly to a teaching position in Chicago when the Institute of Fine Art at New York University would not hire him, even as a temporary lecturer, although private funds were offered to offset the cost. Now honors are raining on him, but for years he labored, with virtually no recognition, as something called an "independent scholar." I can remember his being turned down for three separate Guggenheim grants, and I can remember his tales (I once thought it was paranoia) about being refused permission, as a German refugee scholar, by Miss Frick to use the Frick Art Reference Library. He gave the prestigious Blashfield Lecture in 1981 to the Academy of Arts and Letters—a brilliant and amusing account of the difference between writing in German, French, and English—but has never been asked to join the academy.

One seldom comes across an "independent scholar" anymore. Even Rewald, to put butter on the table, if not bread, finally had to seek a teaching post and the title "professor." For many years, however, both in Paris and New York, Rewald lived by his writing, by his occasional jobs as guest curator of exhibitions at MOMA (Bonnard, the Fauves, Redon, Cézanne, etc.), and by his wits. This last category, in Rewald's case, took the form of a generous open-door policy for collectors, dealers, and auctioneers from all over the world who sought him out for archival material, provenances of paintings and drawings, and, of course, judgments of authenticity. A consultation fee from collectors was customary for the work involved: for many years it did not exceed $100. Often, however, due to embarrassment or excessive politeness on one side or the other, no fee at all was paid. In the case of mail inquiries, Rewald (without a secretary in those days) would spend hours in line at the post office faithfully returning photographs and documents for which stamped return envelopes were invariably not provided. As an art dealer, I never paid a fee; the quid pro quo was understood. Along with other dealers, I supplied photographs and ownership information to Rewald for the great catalogues raisonnés he was compiling (Pissarro and Cézanne). Museums also regularly picked his brain, but almost never acknowledged the source of the information in their files and catalogs.

In short, he was a one-man Courtauld Institute and a walking encyclopedia. Given access, you did not need to do your own research; Rewald did it for you. His insatiable desire for documentary material and for relevant books, as well as his unique position at the nexus of this peculiar traffic in information, led him to create what is probably the best private art library in its field. (The Getty Museum had an opportunity to acquire Rewald's library a few years ago and flubbed it.) An independent scholar lives also by luck and by friendships and by courageous taste. Rewald many years ago acquired a modest but beautifully chosen collection of 19th- and early-20th-century drawings, which he later sold at auction in London. His net from the sale in the early 1960s was about $300,000. Today the total for the same drawings would be in the millions, but by selling then, he preserved his independence for a few more years.

Now all the battles for recognition and all the snubs, real or imaginary (mostly real, I can testify), are over. As befits a great scholar, Rewald's scattered best essays, published over the last 50 years, many not available in English, have now been collected, translated where necessary, and published in England and America simultaneously. These two new volumes of writings on Impressionism and Postimpressionism epitomize the man's work and serve as an excellent warm-up for the magnum opus still to come—the monumental Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings of Paul Cézanne. (The catalog of the watercolors has already appeared—see TNR, September 10, 1984.)

Rewald has a human touch and great gifts as a storyteller, rare in an art historian. I defy anyone to refrain from weeping at his simple straightforward account, in his 1956 history of Postimpressionism, of the death of van Gogh:

> Vincent . . . took his canvas, easel, and paint box and went out into the fields. He also took a revolver, but he may have borrowed it from some peasant on the pretext of shooting crows. Instead he shot himself, but the bullet entered his body below the heart. He fell to the ground, yet was able to get up and start walking back to the inn. Three times on the way he fell. He had buttoned his coat so as to hide his blood-soaked shirt and went up to his small room without speaking to anybody. When he did not come down to dinner, M. Ravoux, the innkeeper, went to

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call for him. He found van Gogh in bed, his face turned to the wall. As Ravoux insisted that he should get up, Vincent suddenly turned around, showed his bloody chest and said: "I tried to kill myself but I missed. . . ."

Reading Rewald is always like reading a book one cannot put down. Through the participant's own recorded words or from eyewitness testimony, we are drawn into events and made to feel their poignancy. In these new volumes he has uncovered direct testimony of the most fascinating and emotionally compelling kind. Before the war, he found the aged brother of Renoir—a 90-year-old "dried up little bonhomme . . . affecting petty airs which only his good humor and nonchalance saved from ridicule." In New Orleans, he found a Mr. Gaston Musson, descendant of Degas's brother, whose family business inspired the famous "Cotton Exchange" painting, probably still the greatest single masterwork produced on these shores. The information about Degas's will and the ultimate fate of his considerable fortune is riveting and typical of Rewald's habit of carrying his stories to their logical end. The nearly book-length chapter in *Studies in Post-Impressionism*, "Theo van Gogh as Art Dealer," is an enormously valuable contribution to the history of taste as well as a mine of new information about the van Gogh family. A second essay, "The Posthumous Fate of Vincent van Gogh," carries the chronicle of that saintly and dedicated family up nearly to the present with its account of the exemplary behavior of Julia Bonger van Gogh, Theo's widow (he died, exhausted and mentally ill, only six months after Vincent's suicide), and of her son, the "Engineer" Vincent W. van Gogh, who created the van Gogh museum in Amsterdam instead of cashing in on his immensely valuable holdings.

Of course, John Rewald knew the "Engineer" van Gogh personally for many years and was given access to the family documents when he needed them. As a young man in Paris, Rewald also formed a friendship with Felix Feneon, who was Seurat's dealer, critical defender, and friend—a living link to the heroic age of early modernism. At his death, Feneon left his papers to the young Rewald. He also established friendships with the sons of Pissarro (who entrusted Rewald with the artist's correspondence), with the family of Signac, with the aged Maillol, with Redon's son, with Monet's descendants, and with several artists of his own generation whose work he admired and collected, such as Balthus, Giacometti, and Masson. Fifty years ago, before time had changed their appearance too much, Rewald photographed Cézanne's beloved "motifs" near Aix and Mont St. Victoire, thus rescuing vistas and images precious for understanding and interpreting Cézanne. Rewald has himself become something of a living link to a great epoch of art. His concentration on direct sources and firsthand testimony ensures the primacy of his work as a factual underpinning for the yards of interpretation and misinterpretation that others may try to wring out of it.

PORTRAIT OF JOHN REWALD BY ANDRÉ MASSON (1957)

It is precisely the misinterpretation of his massive research that pains Rewald today. Having documented the mighty struggles of the great Impressionist and Postimpressionist masters to free painting from the shackles of an academy grown tyrannical and stale, he has watched unhappily as trendy younger scholars have overvalued bad 19th-century art to suit personal political agendas and prejudices. In his essay "Pissarro, Nietzsche, and Kitsch," Rewald writes:

> Souvenir hunters who are presently "rediscovering," or even "rehabilitating," various producers of anemic Salon wares seem completely unconcerned with the fact that what those people manufactured were *unnecessary* pictures. Nor do they appear to recognize that the authors of those commercial artifacts were by no means modest and inoffensive wielders of outmoded and syrupy brushes, but active reactionaries in positions of power.

One consoles oneself with the reverie that the fashionable revisionist nonsense against which Rewald's eloquence and scorn are directed will, like all fashions, one day disappear. When that time comes, these two handsomely designed and produced volumes (a rarity in art books these days) will still be read as part of the fundamental art history of that great epoch of creativity to which John Rewald has devoted his life.

EUGENE VICTOR THAW

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CHICAGO DIARIST

For Heaven's Sake

SOONER OR LATER every churchgoer has to get used to the politicization of worship. My own efforts to escape it have led me to sample so many different churches that my wife says I should review them for my newspaper, like a restaurant critic. I have heard Presbyterian calls for a nuclear arms freeze, Lutheran denunciations of American policy in Central America, Methodist condemnations of the U.S. air raid on Tripoli. The political tilt is not entirely uniform; in Christ there is both right and left. It came as a change, though not a relief, to hear the minister of a nondenominational Protestant congregation rail against gun control and welfare. Now a committee of the United Methodist Church has decided that the hymnal must also be brought into ideological conformity. Hymns containing militaristic or sexist imagery should be discarded or rewritten. Among those relegated to the memory hole were "Onward, Christian Soldiers," which depicts the faithful "marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before," and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," which is irredeemably martial from the title on. "I'm trying to raise my boys to be peacemakers, not soldiers, and it's not easy," said one committee member. This came as a disappointment to those of us who cling to the hope that one day a congregation of hymn-singing Methodists will be inflamed to charge out of the sanctuary and set about putting Sabbath-breakers to the sword. But for now the hymnal is safe, since the recommendation has yet to be adopted. Infidels beware.

IN 1983 THE National Council of Churches adopted an "inclusive lectionary," consisting of Bible readings revised to eliminate sexist language. This overhaul yielded such changes as replacing "the Lord" with "the Sovereign One" and excising every possible personal pronoun, as in "God has sworn by God's right hand." Even the sex of Jesus was disguised wherever possible. Fortunately, at least in the churches I've attended, the new approach hasn't caught on. But the project suggests that some Christians think they could have done a much better job of designing this religion than the Almighty did.

THE POLITICAL VIEWS OF liberal churches aren't confined to internal matters. After the U.S. attack on Libya, a statement of condemnation was issued jointly by the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Christ, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Church of the Brethren, and the Mennonite Central Committee. It is presumably a tribute to the power of the Holy Spirit that churches which cannot agree among themselves on the most basic theological doctrines are led to identical revelations on any question involving American foreign policy. The statement demands, "Will more violence bring an end to violence? This is what the world believes and what the Bible does NOT teach." The pacifism is selective. Back when the World Council of Churches was giving money to the black rebels fighting the racist government of Rhodesia, the Presbyterians took pains to excuse the guerrillas' use of force. And if the church has condemned the Sandinistas for answering violence with violence, this Presbyterian missed it.

MEANWHILE, OVER ON THE right, fundamentalists lobby for officially sponsored prayer in schools, mobilize behind Pat Robertson's nascent presidential candidacy, and applaud the Meese commission for proposing a crackdown on pornography. One of their mistakes is pretending that Scripture offers definitive guidance on matters of public policy. In fact, Christians have found ways to justify nearly every government and ideology that has appeared over the last 2,000 years, which should induce a certain humility about the value of our faith in illuminating political matters. They also lack a healthy skepticism about the potential of earthly schemes to advance divine ends. Their willingness to impose on nonbelievers what faith requires of believers is inconsistent. The legions of the Moral Majority may want the state to prohibit sodomy, but don't want it to enforce the obligation to "sell what you have, and give to the poor." When believers rationalize their political views with pious appeals to religion, they don't add much to the political debate, but they do dramatize a theological point: fallen man's immutable capacity for self-delusion.

IF YOU WANT TO know where the churches went wrong, it's worth looking at the seminaries. A glimpse of one was provided recently by the *New York Times Magazine*, in a profile of a 23-year-old divinity student at Princeton's Union Theological Seminary, one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious. Jeffrey Vamos, the son of a Presbyterian minister, subscribes to the idea that the important work of the church is political. His motive for attending seminary: "I was interested in U.S.-Soviet relations, and North America-South America issues. Ministry seemed a way of bridging the problems between nations." After a trip to the Soviet Union, he notes that the Soviet children "had no pierced ears or designer jeans" and that "one of the sad facts is our missiles are trained on some of these same children I saw." In agonizing over whether to give a cheeseburger to a bag lady, he chides himself for "experimenting in being in solidarity with the poor," but he gives it to her anyway. These habits of mind may be expected, given his environment, in which, says the *Times*, "much of the discussion both inside and outside classes focuses on questions of race and class, America's relationship to the Third World, and liberation theology. . . ." One of his professors is James Hal Cone, whose contributions to theology included the proposition that "the kingdom of God is a *black* happening. It is black people saying No to Whitey." In a tutorial discussion, after some of his classmates insist he cannot possibly understand the problems of blacks, women, homosexuals, and Native Americans, Vamos asks, "How does this engage a person who's white and maybe an oppressor just by being who he is?" His tutorial leader retorts: "As a feminist theologian, I don't have to answer that." But by the end of the article, our seminarian has struggled to the conclusion that the kingdom of God can accommodate even white heterosexual males. Whew! That was close.

STEPHEN CHAPMAN

Stephen Chapman, a former TNR staff writer, is a syndicated columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*.

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ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

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All the best,

Gene Wilder

Gene Wilder and . . .

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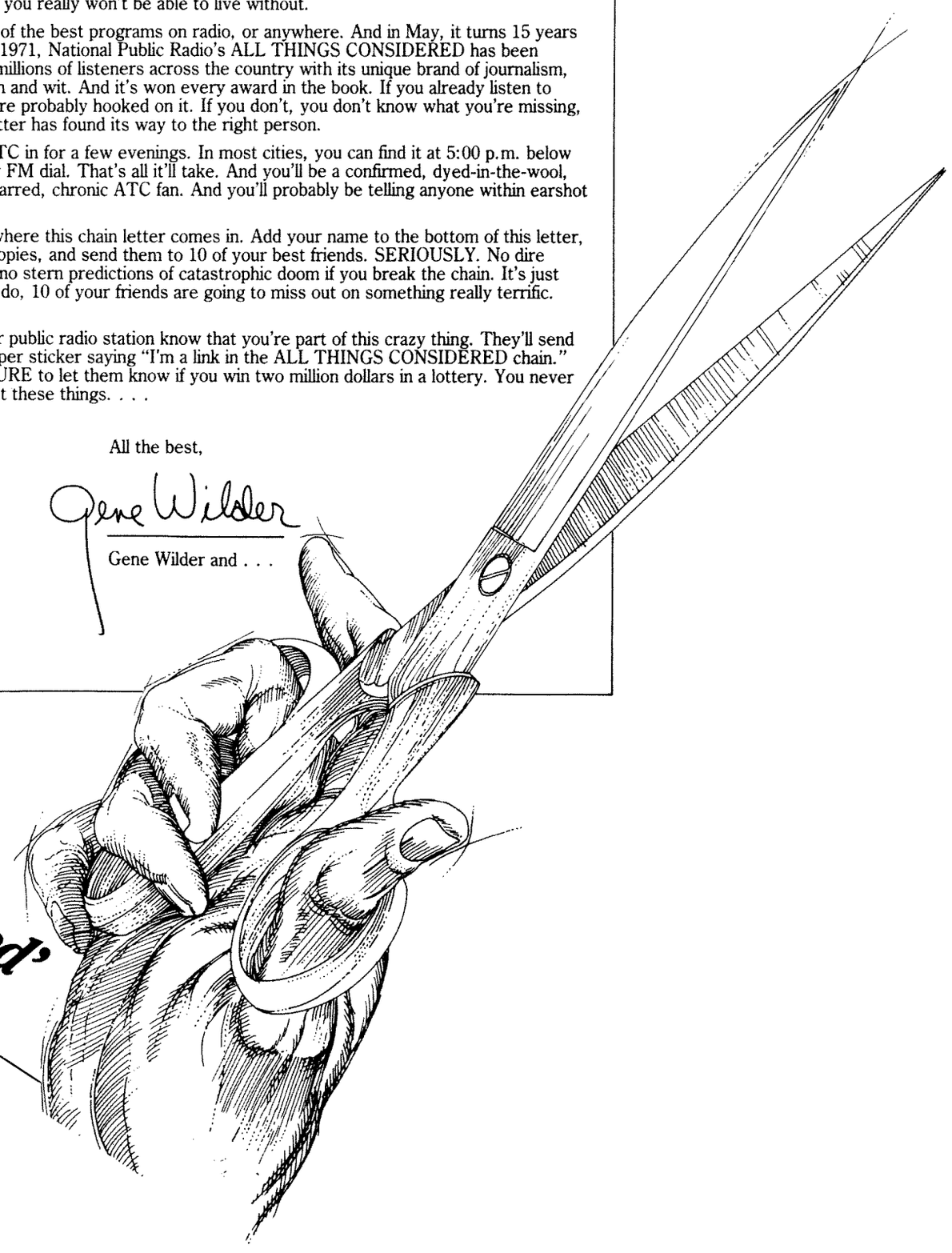

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